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POEMS

CHARLES WELLS RUSSELL

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POEMS





CHARLES WELLS RUSSELL

P O E M S

BY
CHARLES WELLS RUSSELL



THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY
440 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
MCMXXI

KE 542

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INTRODUCTION

Whatever tends to contribute to the public's further acquaintance with the thoughts and impulses of a prominent character is always of value; and when the character himself offers a contribution so intimate as is this volume of poems, then is that value significantly augmented. Therefore, this collection of the poetry,—the word is here used in its noblest sense,—of Charles Wells Russell, now for the first time published, makes a revealing and important addition to the world's knowledge of a man whose juridical achievements and diplomatic, political, and scholarly activities are too conspicuous to need emphasis here. That this expression of the Publishers is more than a mere impression is ably sustained by the following extract from a letter written by Dr. Henry Van Dyke, to whom some of the verses of Dr. Russell,—at the time (1914) United States Minister to Persia,—had been presented by another than their author:

You knew beforehand how I would enjoy such verses as these. They have a double interest when I remember the active and useful public life of the man who wrote them, and the good work he has done for our country in fighting against all sorts

of abuses, and in promoting the real progress of America. I should like him to know how much I admire this side of his activity, and how much pleasure I have found in his poetry.

It is fortunate for the world that reads that the application of Dr. Russell's knowledge to useful ends still granted him freedom for the indulgence of his artistic tastes and failed of power to choke the poetic expression of an imagination that claims as its ardent ally apparently limitless erudition; the Doctor's already adequate endowment having been further enriched by extensive travel. Indeed, this familiarity with foreign climes probably has much to do with the investing of his work with the wizardry known as "atmosphere," which is so keenly sensed when he seems to be singing in the rose-rich land of Iran, or beneath the moonlit skies of Italy, his exquisite songs,—songs eloquent with tenderness and pathos and peace and hope; songs lighted by vagrant smiles and rainbow-glinting tears, with here and there the poignant note of a sob of sorrow, or a groan for grace. Which, after all, gives but a hint of the book's enchantment.

Here they live, these skillfully-woven fabrics of fancy and feeling of the poet, Dr. Russell, to whom has been graciously granted by Providence one of its greatest gifts: the pleasure of increasing the emotional, intellectual, and artistic pleasure of the ever-avid world of letters.

THE PUBLISHERS.

POEMS

BY CHARLES WELLS RUSSELL

LELIA

Dedication

HER busy hand, in homely ways,
All tireless, toils its daily share,
Nor waits for either blame or praise,
And silent is her daily prayer.
No tragic art she knows to prove
How deep, how pure may be devotion.
Unuttered every thought of love,
She dares not trust with her emotion
A tongue unskilled to show a part
Of that which overflows the heart.
When nights and days, when friends seemed
fewest,
She stood beside a bed of pain
Explaining that she was the truest,
And in these words did this explain
(Words eloquent as words can be) :
"Here, take and drink this cup of tea."

REST

COME with me to the mountain peaks
O'er paths that neither start nor end
Yet lead past twinkling forest flowers
To that still world where beauty seeks
The peace she cannot find in ours.
Ah, dearest, come! and with me spend
Time reckoned not by loss of hours.

The unremembering air shall play
Upon his harp of many strings
Soft harmonies forever new,—
For thee their secret charms display
Wild morning-glories drenched in dew,
And drafts as cool shall yield the springs
As maid or mænad ever drew.

SPRING

WHERE the wood and meadow met
The bluet and the violet,
Purer than a saint's regret,
Shook their fair heads from the wet.

“Dainty snowdrop blue,” said I,
“Thou art fair, but far too shy,—
Thou and thy sweet cousin lie
Hid, like truants from the sky.”

Then I asked: “Thou little maid,
Wherefore of a kiss afraid?”

Answering when she could, she said :
"To thy soul that sin was laid."

After all unfeigned surprise,
Questions low, with no replies,
Came a new light in her eyes,—
Came a shower of tears and sighs.

HOME

I've builded thee a mansion gay
Upon a secret height,
Where days as fleet as hours in May
Descend on waves of light
From Heaven, no longer far away.
Anear thee shall alight
A peace that there shall brood and stay
Through all the day and night.

The eagles whirl about their young
A mile or more below,
And in and out, the clouds among,
The lightnings come and go,
And farther down, like silken thong,
The flashing rivers flow.

There shalt thou stroke the fawn, or feel
The graceful panther press
Against thy knee his thews of steel,
Awhine for thy caress,
And never sight nor sound reveal
The other world's distress.

ABSENCE

AH, I wonder if thou knowest
How my love is love indeed,
Or the comfort thou bestowest
In my loneliness and need,—
Through the day where'er thou goest
That my thought are bees that feed!

Ah, and when the dusky even
Steals the day and night between
Dost thou know their din in heaven,—
Dost thou know their flying keen
By mad gladness made uneven,—
Are they heard, or felt, or seen?

Then they linger to behold thee
From the lightning of their flight;
Then they weave around to fold thee
In the charmèd peace of night.
Have they whispered thee and told thee
What is winging their delight?

NOON

THE poet lay beneath the trees
Translating what an amorous breeze
In Sanskrit, Greek, or Japanese
Did whisper his rapt ear to please;
And so he labored (carpeted
Upon a rug of gold and green
Inwove with thread of blue and red,—

An Arab plan, with silken sheen)
Till half the golden hours were sped ;
Till all the little tribes that dwell
Where only he and robbers hide
Lay stricken by the hot noon-tide
And all the breezes speechless fell
And not a cow did ring her bell :—
Naught moves, save one forsaken cloud,
The reason being nothing can ;
And all is silent, even the loud
Siesta of the great god Pan.

THE WILD ROSE

WHEN I was lost within a forest, child,
There came the lone song of a brooklet wild,
Then, turning sharply round where with a vine
A dance of water-gleams did intertwine,
A white rose, trembling in the brooklet's spray,
Bowed at me with an unaffected grace.
I could but pause, and lo, I soon did trace
Where near the rose my long-lost pathway lay !
So fair that flower it scarce were seen, sweet maid,
If plucked and on your own fair bosom laid ;
But far less dark the wild than that which threw
Its shadows round me when I met with you.

SLEEP

SHE loved me only, called me a sweet name,
But ah, she seemed a visitor that came
And not a child of day !

And when she slept, she never turned, nor
sighed,
But my poor heart beat fast, lest ill betide,
Or her kindred take her away.

I watched her sleep, and envied the cool air
That could so lightly steal to lift her hair
And kiss the rare, pale maid.
How could I leave, when she might dream of
woe,
With none to whisper: "I am here, and so
Sleep on,—be not afraid!"

I sat and watched, and loved each lingering
hour
That gave her rest!—and ah, I had the power
Out of my love and will
To keep her human and prolong her stay!
Like Heaven was the night; and in the day
I had her with me still!

THE ARBOR

Now thou art gone, how fair the night!
How sweet the breezes and how bright
The flowers! Like a radiant dream
The blooms that fleck the arbor seem.
But all night long they pine and pray
And wait and listen,—I and they,
Hearing the petulant whippoorwill,
Which only maketh the night more still
And the aching void more plain,—

Till I press the flowers to my cheek and the
 pain
Pierces the numbness of heart and brain,
Shakes me from madness,—from dreaming
 again
That I have not lost thee!—that never yet
I knew such a being as I regret,—
Till I know all real is my despair!
Then into the glow of the luminous air,
As into a song its sigh or prayer,
A shadow passes, and over all
The benediction of sleep doth fall.

LOVE

SHE fed her spirit from the tree
 Whose fruit o'erhangs the springs of light,
Seeing the far dawns yet to be
 Aglimmer on the mountain height,
And dreaming as a summer sea
 Dreams, folded in the arms of night.
Ah, lost dove from some bluer day!
 Ah, light waif from a purer sky!
Ah, dear hours that forever stay
 Anear me and on slumber lie,
Like roses on the breast of May!

She heard a far-off people cry
In anguish,—forth with no delay
She drove me, while she wept good-bye.

WEALTH

Am I, then, poorer than these landlords all
Who boast of splendid wealth in lands and gold?
They are but vassals mine and in my thrall:
What theirs the caitiffs claim, for me they hold.

Do I not seek my pleasure 'mid "*their*" trees,
These many miles around, and by each spring,
While they are toiling, take my lordly ease?
For me they toil; for me around they fling

Those velvet carpets greener than all green;
Mine is the bird which, redder than all red,
Bursts on me like a sudden flame between
White laurel buds and boughs that lean o'erhead.

Have I not chosen me upon yon hill
A mansion fairer than are made with hands,—
A home ancestral,—stately,—what you will,
Where at each side a towering poplar stands?

What priceless pictures hang upon the walls!
Such works the antique masters painted not
Who spared no pains on paler "*cardinals*,"
And saints that died for virtues now forgot.

For me they whet the scythe,—ah, yes, for me!—
To spread abroad the scent of new-mown hay;
For me they sowed yon grain which, like a sea,
Rolls laughing round the trembling feet of May.

UNTRUE

THEY told me thou art light and gay
And changeful as the clouds of May.
I see thee 'mid a giddy throng
Whirled in merry dance along,—
Thy soul,—that *had* been—not more sweet
Than thy frail form and twinkling feet;
Then, lo, to seek the glimmering shade
By poplars in the moonlight made,
Touching the lush grass of the lawn
Lightlier than a startled fawn,
Concealed within the portico
I watch thee,—with another,—go,
Flushed and whispering soft and low.
Trembling, I note the roses fair,—
My roses!—glowing in thy hair,—
And then, just then, two tender eyes,—
The stars of a lost paradise,—
Are turned on me in sad surprise.

SUMMER

Now thou art gone, the sweetest bird of all
For thee is lone and hath no rest at all,
But sits and sings, Belovèd, the whole night
long
Through many changes one unending song
Of love, of longing and of past delight,
Filling, as thou did 'st fill, the hollow night
O'erfull with music,—in his soul's distress
Recalling scenes I can but partly guess.

But now he sings of some lone rose that stood
Fairest in the wild gardens of the wood,
And now beholds 'neath softer skies than these,
Across the reaches of the southern seas,
A languid houri wakened from her dreams,
Where almost true man's sweetest vision seems,
And from the heart the fetters melt and fall,—
Where life is love, and love is all in all!

He sings of fear and grief and vain regret,
Of lights that waned and glooms that linger
yet,
Of her whose touch could cool a fevered brain,
Or turn to melody the cries of pain,—
Of one, love-mad, that to the midnight moon
Was ever muttering sweet thoughts out of
tune;
Of rankly odorous cedars and the breath
Of flowers o'erblown and sickening to their
death.
And now he follows summer (that hath flown)
Slowly through golden dreams to us unknown,
Or lingers where the secret dove repines
Above the writhing torsos of the vines
Or rests within the tops of murmuring pines.
He tells how, wandering, still he longs for
home;
And then I wait, and on the listening air
A passionate silence rises, like a prayer.

But now aloud the wood and garden ring,
For he is seized with tumult, and his soul
Exults with music wild beyond control!

I hear,—oh, hear!—through night's resounding halls
'Tis thee he calls, Belovèd, on thee he calls,—
That thou may'st come, Belovèd, may'st come
again
And when thou comest, evermore remain!

DREAMS

WHY should I die, if I such dreams can dream?
After the hours when all things shadows seem
And love is only pain
There come the sweet caresses of pale night
When she unveils her loveliness to sight
And woos to dreams again.

'Twas but a dream,—and yet it is not gone!
I feel its presence yet; ah, till the dawn,—
Perhaps the livelong day,—
My heart may still be singing with delight,—
Still, in the sky and on the earth, a light
Shine, and not pass away!

What was the dream?—I only partly know;
I knew the voice that whispered sweet and low;
The hand that—almost!—I pressed;
After a strange mistake, and grief in vain,
Almost it was as it had been again.
Some time I'll dream the rest!

NIGHT

“NAY, drive me not away again!
For thee I live, or live in vain!
Must I, then, fleeing slander’s tongue,
Forsake thee, lest it do me wrong?
A higher dream my young heart seeks,
Ahungered for the mountain peaks,—
Ah, let me by thy side remain!

“I’ll ask for nothing in return,—
Oh, do but let me stay, and learn
To lift thy faint head from the ground
And hold thee till a path be found
Through dark vales to some twilight land
Where cool springs run o’er purple sand,
And pale in heaven the sweet stars burn!

“Ah, bitter is thy need!” The maid,
So speaking, laid her hand on mine
And gently as a spirit freed,
Or from its nest a bird will lead,
To where the needles of the pine
Lie thickest, led me, unafraid.

RUTH

BEERSHEBA’S road that led from Dan,
Or Boaz’ field when Ruth was seen,
Not lovelier than the path which ran
Where Ruth,—immortal,—wept between
The hill-top pasture and the wood!

There, like a fallen sumac gleaming,
The cardinal wove his thread of flame,
And eyes were with a promise beaming
Naomi would have understood,
And like a shower the tear-drops came.

Ah, me!—that hers, the tenderest,
The clearest, sweetest life of all,
Should soonest lose its little best,—
'Ere yet might wholly fade and fall
The lilies of an Eastern morn
(As some frail vine which hath caressed
A stricken tree, apart is torn
By idle winds), should withering lie
Or, panting for the light, should die!

ROSES

STILL as fair the flower we planted
Near these walls by dead hopes haunted
O'er its trellis, where we spaded
Climbs, by strangers' fingers aided.
Long and pendulous, like a vine,
It hangs in the dusk its roses fine.
And whenever too starless my night appears
And the pain of longing too keen for tears,
I enter this garden, by all unseen,
And linger where thou and thy care have been.
The trellis, then, like an altar stands,
And I bow before it with clasped hands:
And I know, wherever thou kneel in prayer,
One name, unforgotten, is murmured there.

A DRYAD

AH, who so fair a soul would stain
With guilty sense of others' pain?
(I marked not then, in Druid aisles,
These painted windows rich in story,—
Those oriels filling dim defiles
With the brief wealth of evening's glory,—
I only saw the light that glowed
Around thee and, upon thy hair,
The ruddy wine the sun bestowed
Until its waves were overflowed,—
And thou,—with radiance everywhere,
And drank the effluence more divine
From thy calm eyes and wholly thine;)
For who can mend the ruined vase
The morning-glory once lets fall,
Or who within the nest replace
Its wingèd loss, or back may call
The perfume which the rose that dies
Trails thro' the portals of the skies,
Or love's first sigh, more fair than all!

FORGOTTEN

I SEEK for peace beneath the murmuring leaves
Where deepest lie and rot in mould their kin,
And in the heavens where busy midnight weaves
Her charms the palpitating dome within
Until it gleams and murmurs like a shell,
And on the lapping waves of blue that bear

Sometimes to pleasant lands, where ever dwell
The radiant dreams that flee from ours. There
The dead day riseth as a night more fair :
And then I seek it 'mid the cries of pain
Where fellow-travelers bleed and faint and fall,
For thou would'st go—and I be left—again—
A parting far more bitter yet than all—
If from the iron in my soul I wrought
No ribs for frailer barks with sorrow fraught
And so I seek what on before me flies,
And sometimes, when I sleep, it softly lies
Upon me like a mantle dearly bought.

AUTUMN

Is autumn come or summer still advancing?
Beside the path the scarlet sumac falls;
Like larger swallows, through the twilight glancing,
The night-birds throng; no more the partridge
calls;
The hillside rain (pale warriors homeward trooping
When war is over) blurs the whitened trees;
Beside the hopeless bud, resigned is drooping
The finished flower, which the faithful breeze
Caresses ever with a touch more tender.
Now is there pause, for now at length is won
From nest and field the harvest, fat or slender.
Now can we bear of those whose race is run
To think, at least, they rest, if not again
To greet us ever. Now the meek September
Exerts herself with golden stress, in vain,
Puffing her cheeks at summer's dying ember.

Now in the trees there sounds a minor tone
For him whose hopes in life, not death, are
thwarted,
Who cannot feel that only he is lone.
But let us leave this to the broken hearted,
And look how that which careth for us all
Is busy where the bees and apples fall.

FRIENDSHIP

THE gamut of the less and larger hills
Which swells beneath the touch of autumn's
fingers,
From the torn bosom drives its flock of ills;
And where the great notes end there lifts and
lingers
A prophecy or promise, which a mind
That is not like the owl at midday flying
By hate pursued, but loves all human kind,
In part may read. And from the oaks replying,
A voice mysterious doth softly tell
One secret of the many: "All is well."
And felt, not seen, the presence doth descend
Of him who, friendless 'mid his wheeling spheres,
Made the vast mind of man, to comprehend
Himself and them, and gave it love and tears.

LUCY

AH, touch those minor chords again,—
They steal away a nameless pain;

And let me take that little flower,
So pure, so fresh, so sweetly fair.
Its odor seems to share the power
Which hides within that simple air,
To wake the true and beautiful,
With hovering wings unseen to lull
To peace beyond compare!

Play on, that I may close tired eyes
And dream of honeyed hours gone by,
Or waken in a paradise
That not as far away doth lie,
Seeing revealed the glory of thy soul,
Catching its sweetness in the notes that roll
In great waves by,—
Feel thy heart throbbing in the notes that roll
Their great waves by!

Play on,—now evening thro' the bar
Shepherds the loitering flocks of night,
And on a sea of peace doth rock afar
The cradle of a newly born delight
Beneath a sky of love without a stain!—
Ah, play, dear child, and play, and play again,
Until—good-night!

SONG

“To bless—not gain” is love’s refrain,
And so ’twill be forever,—
The heart must die and live again,
And self lie dead forever,

Or thou shalt know the sacred glow
Of love's delight—ah, never!

Oh, come and know how deep is woe,—
How near thou art to Heaven;
Oh, come and feel a music peal
Which jars the gates of Heaven,—
Oh, come and fare where angels are
And peace and prayer at even!

MEMORIES

WHEN no one sees
The burning tear-drops unforbidden well
From thoughts that may in utterance find no ease—
Secrets that partly to ourselves we tell
When no one sees.

When none are near the pitiless shadow feeds
As it may please
And, ravening, stirs the bones of evil deeds;
Yet, mid the dross, and fairer so, may spring,
Beneath the trees,
A few white buds, along the path to fling
Some fragrance, and more welcome tears may bring
When no one sees.

DOROTEA

THOU art a powerful sorceress whose spell
All near thee weakens;

Thou art a rock uncharted,—all in vain
Are towers and beacons!

Thine is the modest loveliness only bared
By flowers at even;
Thy heart is sweeter than within them lie
The dews of heaven.

Thou art the limitless depth of space,—the soft
Blue veil that hides it;
Thou art the ocean's dark abyss, the wave,
The bird that rides it.

Like flashes from a dread volcano's cloud
Shoot thy swift glances,—
As music o'er the moonlight water stealing,
Thy sigh entrances.

Idly they doubt or fear!—to pluck a flower
Gives pain to thee,
Thou silent dove upon a masthead clinging
Far out at sea!

Thou art an angel, weary and disheveled,
With feet that bleed,
Bringing a light to one within the shadow
His steps to lead,—

Nay, not an angel either,—one still dearer
To anguish human:
Thou art,—when one beholds with vision
clearer,—
A little woman!

HOLDING THE REINS

A GOLDEN chariot swift is driven
From ocean to the fields of heaven,
And there its white steeds champ, all sweat-
ing

From the steepness of their pull;
Silver tones their hoofs are beating;

From their harness beautiful
Jewels glance and gleam like dew.
They hurry thro' the fields of blue,
Flowing mists their necks adorning,
While a boy that heeds no warning,
But that fearful height disdains,
Sits and pulls the silken reins.

But the bravest meet disaster;
And the steeds run faster and faster
Till, amid the unseen dangers,
Strikes a golden wheel. The bridle,
Straining, breaks. Then, as a stranger's,
Hear those steeds his shoutings idle.
They are loose and wander free,
Here and there o'er land and sea,
Till the old sea-hunger stings them
And their own wild nature flings them
Forward over crags and snows.
Downward each then leaping goes,
Past the topmost pines, unresting,—
Past the eagles, madly breasting
Danger thousandfold,—still lunges
Onward (while a white nymph plunges
By him, clinging to his mane),
Back to the ricks of foam again.

DRIFTWOOD

THERE is a book which drifted long unread,
And in it wild-flowers pale and long since dead ;
A poem called "The Book of Job" therein
Also is found, 'mid tales of God and sin,
And one brief scrawl which spells to memory's
eye

As precious words as in its covers lie ;
For there, in girlish style, is lightly penned
The name of her, a first and dearest friend,—
Of one who was when in the skies o'erhead
As yet a glory shone (with her it fled!)
Freely she lived,—nor bowed she to the high,
Nor scorned the low, but lent a ready sigh
To each one's sorrow, with a kindly smile
For all but those who gossiped and the vile.
One only other woman's name those pages
As good as she have snatched from ruined ages.
Unmarried, "Miss" she wrote and not the
name

I knew so well,—I ne'er had seen this other ;
And as I read it, through the tears that came,
I smiled to think a "Miss" should be my
Mother.

PEACE

O MY comrades, why such eagerness and hastening,
Such gulping down of life and never tasting ?

I am going,—you may tarry here in town.
The trees do not hurry in their growing,

Nor even the little flowers to their blowing,
Nor the red leaf to its fall among the brown.
Ye will not hide yourselves where I shall hide me,
Where fern and laurel linger green beside me,
And soothe the hectic year with dreams of
spring ;
Ye will not know the wild primeval feeling
When solitude and stillness, gently stealing,
Untie the cords that bind the spirit's wing ;
Ye will not hear life's undersong the ocean
Singeth around the keen ship's quiet motion
And the cedars and the hidden rivers sing.

SHADOWINGS

BENEATH the smoky rafters of the pines
The cedar's censer swung,
And, bending in the chancel dim and bare,
A maiden spirit all her wealth of prayer
From mines of sorrow wrung
Poured on the quivering stillness of the wood ;
For then was heard
No wildwood cry,—no dreaming bird,—
No voice but of the throbbing of her blood
And beating of the waves of upper air,—
Prayed for a mortal's love,—
Of immortality and barren ease
Sick now to death, as of a slow disease.

Unpitying, cold, upon the depth above
Her ship of pearl, 'mid softly scudding seas,
The chaste moon steered. "Oh, soon!—oh,
soon!"

The wan one sighed and sighed again,
As if in answer: "Pain?—yea, death and
pain,—

Yes, give me these, that I may be like him
And he may love me! Oh, disrobe me all
Of power, and with mortal passion dim

A form that blinds and awes, and quick let
fall

The triple veil of light which hides this brow
From mortals,—let him love me!—now,—oh,
now!"

She waited. First came shadows, warm and
blent

With many odors sweet and pungent,—sent
As heralds of a presence of delight,—

And lo, was heard the spirit of the night:
"Behold!" she cried, "thou fool and traitor
base

To piety and realm and ancient race,—
Thou shalt be mortal!" "Oh!

By what strange words to give me all!"

"Yea, strange to thee, but stranger shalt thou
know:

When that our messenger did fetch thy
prayer,

Came one from him thou seekest to thy fall:

'Make me,' that starry youth, whose stream-
ing hair

Doth like my girdle glitter, cried:

'If in thine eyes my secret heart is fair,

Make me a deathless spirit of the air!'

I heard him, and to mortal ken, he died."

Then as a star a heavenly beauty glowed
'Ere it was quenched, and onward swiftly
strode

The mighty presence, while a woman there
Fell fainting, like a wilful, loveless bride.

THE FEATHER

SEÑORA, let much fanning be
And listen: there is on my mind
Or in my blood, a word for thee;
And I would have it soft and kind.

The gold rim on thy languid arm,
The whiteness of that small white glove
For such as thou may have a charm,—
Not truth,—not loyalty,—nor love.

“Oh, love,—my love,—is low desire,—
’Twas clear that, since our game began.
’Twas not thy fault if too much fire
Was kindled by a careless fan.

“José would not insult thee so.”
Such coquetry as coiled and sprung!
With kindly words,—’tis best,—I go.
But who would dream?—and one so young!

“José can love a woman well:
He holds her kindly in his arms.
And José’s not the man to tell
How much he knows about her charms.”

José—José! Yes,—yes,—I know.

And yet I deemed this woman good:
Dreamed that but holy fires could glow
In eyes so soft! 'Twas but a mood—

One sweet hour wandering from far days
To shrivel in the glare of shame.
Don José take thee!—go thy ways!
Play on with other hearts thy “game!”

How daintily that raven hair
She decked for me with trembling spray
Plucked from a living bird! She'd wear
My love thus for some Don José!

“More love! Ah, love is but a word
For silly maidens of sixteen!
For thee the dance,—the eyesight blurred
With wine, and kisses crushed between.

“I stay too long,—my presence tires;
But this, the final time, thou'lt bear
The torture, since José admires
Thy patience toward me.” Have a care!

Señora, if not love, there's fear!
What have I said? Ah, stay,—yet stay!
For if 'tis pain to have thee near,
I shall go mad with thee away!

“I must forgive, then, this,—the worst?”
So, thou wilt drag me in the dust?
Yet, by thy dark-eyed beauty cursed,
I love thee still, because—I must.

Nay!—wherefore cast beneath thy feet
That feather?—it is fair to see.
“That crime thou never shalt repeat.”
My pain, 'alas, was naught to thee!

But have I erred and done thee wrong?
José? “I am thy Don José!
To me,—a fool,—thou dost belong!”
A pardon, on my knees, I pray!

ALONE

OH, tell me, dost thou blame and hast thou
sorrow?—

Dost brood on that wild hour
When thou didst beg of me,—didst pray to borrow
Wisdom, or calm, or power

Which lay beyond thee and thy heart of woman,—
That lost hour when I could
Have stilled and left thee—had we been less
human—
Had I myself withstood,—

When, with my all of dark laid bare before thee,—
Full many a spot and stain,
Thou could'st not stem the flood-tide that rushed
o'er thee
From the uncharted main?

Ah, we have seen each other well!—one only
Thus such as thou behold,

But after, dear, the world is nowhere lonely,
The heart grows never cold.

Now never may our Pleiades unheeded
Before thee spread their skein,
Nor quite may fail the faint, the sorely needed
Hope all will be again.

So, then, dream on! Ah, wake not from a dream-
ing
In which thy heart's all lies:
All peace, all promise, be it sooth or seeming,
The starlight of such skies!

GOSSIP

“Good morrow,” said the butterfly,
And fain with him would prattle;
The tortoise winked a weary eye
At all her tittle-tattle.

Said she to me: “I know,” said she,
Why his politeness fails him,
He cares not how his neighbors be
And nothing ever ails him;

“A life of scorn for all things born
He stingily doth spend it,
And slyly hides from morn to morn,
So time forgets to end it.

“Such sinners can be touched,” said she,
“And stirred to great emotion,—

It needs the merry fire, you see,
To set some hearts in motion."

"But thou," said I, "what life is thine
That thou mayest scorn thy brother's?
I know thee; thou dost play and dine,—
What dost thou for the others?"

"Before a drooping girl I fly
To paint her cheeks with roses,—
I light a twinkle in her eye
And fill her hands with posies.

"I am a living ecstasy,
The handmaid of the flowers;
I bring their dresses, which you see
Hung in the sunny showers;

"The plumage of sweet thoughts am I—
Fair Venus' fairest daughters,
The wings whereon they float and fly
O'er woods and fields and waters.

"I tear my mummy-cloth and rise
(All *poets* know my duty)
To mirror gleams from Paradise
Of hope and joy and beauty!"

I would have answered, but the tips
Of Psyche's fingers pressing,
Did gently seal my angry lips,
And left the tortoise guessing.

JEPHTHA'S DAUGHTER

I LOOKED,—and she was gone! She had been there
Before there came a darkness everywhere,
 For plain was seen
(And nothing else mine eyes would see at all)
The dogwood leaf a trembling hand let fall
 Where she had been.

Into the depths of fatherhood had swept
Another flood,—those deeps whose billows slept
 In restless rest
When the pale moon, but not the sun, returned;
That shone no more!—its sunken glory burned
 Beyond the west.

My sorrow's child stood splendid and serene,—
No thought of self, except as all had been
 Vain sacrifice
For one, now hopeless, she had lived to cheer.
With upward look she spoke (and shed no tear):
 "Through pain we rise!"

An amulet,—a relic,—now I wear
(That last brave word so sweetly spoken there),
 A jewel bright
As those that shine glad lovers' eyes to please,
Kindled in shells by throbbings of disease
 In deep-sea's night.

COMFORT

WHERE the bare white bones are bleaching,
And the bare black arms upreaching;

Where last summer's face is blotted,
Blurred and crumpled, marred and spotted
Till it never may again
Lifted be from mire and rain,—

There I hide me from the city;
From men's gazes and their pity;
From their praises and their scorning,
In the chillness of the morning,—
In the darkness or the light
Which is neither day nor night,—

And, when limping rabbits shiver,
And the loose vines drip and quiver,
And only on the laurel's fingers
Glinting leaf of green yet lingers;
Then,—ah, then!—the blessed cold
Quenches thought to ashes old.

SERE

WHERE'ER I turn, the pungent smell of leaves,—
The odor of their fatal fever,—flies;
For, like a serpent through the forest trailing,
Creeps now the busy one that never dies,
Crosses the one that never is across,
And leaveth blight along the track he weaves.
And yet I cannot hear a sound of wailing,—
And yet I do not feel a sense of loss.

As calmly as to watch the billows break,
I gaze upon this manifold decay,

Delighting in its green and gleaming jewel
Of laurel leaf, with settings brown and gray,
Half thankful that the trees are naked all,
And loving for their own pathetic sake
(Not longing for the spring-time and renewal)
The tender, clinging kisses of the fall,—

Too glad for desolation thus complete
To draw me down and fervidly caress,—
To whisper in the hollows of my heart
The secret things of utter calm distress,
To hide me and to still me from alarms,—
To coax me and to lead my weary feet,—
From every wish to win me far apart
Save this,—to rest,—swoon,—perish in such
arms!

THE MISER

Now, like a mute, bedraggled dove,
Day quivers, wounded, where it lies!
And softer are wan memory's cries,
And kind, lean down grey clouds above.

Not here the white reproachful gleam,
The cold, hard candor of the skies,
Or fleckless covering that lies
And makes last summer's face a dream.

Not here pure snow-drops high o'er eaves,
To be like angels' footsteps lifted,
But dingy shreds by each wind shifted
Through miry pathways when it grieves.

Yet here, where ragged mould reeks wet,
The green leaves glint in cameo white,
The rich red berries flame out bright,
And tremble priceless sprays of jet.

Ah, here I love to hide my woe,—
My jewel (while with *hers* the wild
Doth soothe me like a sobbing child),
My dearest jewel,—in the snow!

THINE ANGELUS

DAWN and eve and eve and dawn
Come with dews and come with rain,
For the roses,—roses gone,—
Still bring thee dear thoughts again.
Dawn or eve, if dark or fair,
Little doth my darling care.

Blithely as the mock-birds run,
Flaring over dawn's pale grass,
Or white pigeon in the sun
Swings to feel eve's breezes pass,
So thy soul doth find or leave
Sweet repose at dawn or eve.

Gently bells ring through the morn,
Gentlier at the close of day,
Ringing into hearts forlorn
Comfort and the grace to pray;
Ringing tears, but tears divine
For that happy heart of thine.

SUNSET

WHEN its great white bloom the land
Opened 'neath a dawn serene
Help was none,—on every hand
Sorrow wounded clear and keen :
Like a desert lay the pain
That we ne'er should meet again.

Now at eve wide seas between
Are a story that is told,—
Years, farewells that might have been ;
Unseen arms,—thine arms!—enfold
My lone eyes like brooding wings,
And thy love is near and sings,—

Sings me to the far-off day
When thy smile would flatter grief
Even in a mother's way,—
Sings of life no longer brief
Together, and a rainbow nigh
Trailing roses through the sky.

TO THEE!

No campo santo sees thy form in stone,
Yet hast thou truly a memorial,—one
As loving,—not more sure to melt away ;
For it is I, whom thou hast left so lone :—

It is I, only,—ah, the glittering whole
Not ample were of heaven from pole to pole
To fill the measure of a tomb for thee,
Could any tomb bring comfort to thy soul!

But it is I who, as the beads are told
Upon Time's rosary of jet and gold,
Still wait to learn the secret thou should'st
know,—
What, at the end, his fingers may unfold.

SONG

As, with upraised wings descending,
Pigeons end their long, lone flight,—
So she cometh, slowly wending
Through the waiting hush of night:
Comes to speak of love unending,—
Comes to be my one delight,—

Whispers of no radiant morrow
After years and years of pain,—
Sobs a tale of others' sorrow
They and she can ill sustain,—
Comes to bring,—to bring and borrow
Courage to go on again.

AFTER

THE one that slept had wakened in this child
Whom both had loved. Beside her he beheld
A hope that sobbed in passing, wan and wild.
She knew not; but through childish otherwise,
Before her time her heart of woman swelled
To dry the secret mist that dimmed his eyes.

But this from him she hid, as he from her
And others better hid his pain. Afar
She felt one wish within her bosom stir,—
One only wish,—it would not let her rest;
She watched him with her pity, like a star
That throbbeth for another in the west.

But after, when the storms were overpast,
When round about him weltered leaden peace
And she was something more than child at last,
Their pathways led together, and the two,
Bearing an old-time yearning, with increase,
Long silent stood: from silence, then, they knew.

COME!

CHILD, rest awhile in mine thy fitting hand.
Thy heart's horizon, to the silver brim
With sunshine filled, if wider, might grow dim.
Thou can'st not have thy daisies and a ring.
Ah, if thou listen, do not understand!
But come and love me,—all thy treasures bring.

I do not seek the things that glad thine eyes,—
I do not hear the music in thine ears;
Nor thou the far, faint strains from wondrous
years,
Nor thou the sobs of dear caressing hours!
And what I have is fairer than the skies,
But what thou holdest, Darling, only flowers.

EVENSONG

Now from the shadows fly the swifts, Irene,
As we have watched them fly,
And from the darkened years return
Lost doves of memory,—
And odors of a purple land
Where linger thou and I,

Unknowing, near the parting of the ways,
Irene,
Like children who, in play,
Are lost,—quite lost,—upon the shore
Of one fair summer day.
For now from eve's awakening hours
The veil hath dropped away,

Which seemeth all too near to me, Irene,
Too dreary and too bright;
Which hideth from the longing eyes
The beauty of the night
And from the lonely heart shuts out
A heaven of sweeter light.

IRANIAN

'TIS she whom I could doubt when near
Illuminates these pictured skies,—
More bright than fall of pity's tear
Or dew in lily lies,—

She, lovelier than the moon and star
Wan evening in the ear of night

Departing hangs; more dear by far,—
As dear as lost delight,—

Yea, down the billowy desert's coast,
Its gilded capes that ring afar,
'Tis music's tones I love the most
The palpitating skies unbar,—

For through the wild a splendor sings
Which, singing, to my heart replies:
All melted are the frozen springs,
The buried longings rise.

THE SECRET PLACE

Ah, I would pluck the heart of darkest night
And I would steal the bleeding sunset's heart
To hang rare jewels there, or with delight
Wring tears from thee, belovèd though thou
art,
To deck with dew my offering of flowers
That fades and fails within a few short hours.

Dear, only thou may'st enter,—thou and I,—
And only thou and I may ever know
Where two far golden lamps that hang on high
(Gilding the darkness of the aisles below)
Down alabaster walls soft shadows fling,
Like plumes that fall from some fair angel's
wing.

Like music is the turning of a door;
Like ecstasy the trembling of a veil:

Ah, lead thou on! be near, but on before,—
For too much hope hath made my courage
fail,—
Ah, if thou wilt, go nearer, love, to them,
And on the threshold kiss their garments' hem.

All night long a beauty like the moon!
All night long a sweetness like the stars!
Softer than the waves of afternoon,
To and from the temple's dome and spars,
Carrier doves athwart a desert fly,
And white the desert looks up at the sky.

MINOR CHORDS

IN the spring the young birds have their
mating,
But thou hast only pain!
Full many are the seasons of thy waiting,
And wilt thou hope again?

Thou lovest,—thine are glimpses of that beauty
For which all living yearn,—
Foreshown in silent hour to toil and duty
And secret tears that burn;

And thine love's changeless certainty, the
feeling
Which will not be denied,
Which hears, beyond the dreadful thunder
pealing,
The gay returning tide;

Which sees, about the tower slow bells are
shaking,
The fair white pigeons fly ;
Which waits, how near soe'er the heart to
breaking,—
Still waits and will not die!

AUTUMN LEAVES

FULL sad went he and slow ; but on before
The other ran, with fluttering skirts of white.
He paused and mused beside the brooklet's shore,
Where beech-trees in their images delight.

Full sad was he, and knew,—or deemed he knew,—
No hope should rest upon a heart so young :
A girl,—a child,—a butterfly that flew,
Forever gay, the dancing flowers among.

But there is other wisdom : as the doe
Noteth the leaf, so innocence at play
Heard a faint sigh, the falling leaf of woe,—
Heard and drew near, and would not go away.

SCENERY

NAY, there was dust within mine eyes ;
Thou see'st 'tis a gusty day.
Look ! where an eagle circling flies !
I think I'll put the book away,
For 'tis not well a scene like this
By reading idle verse to miss.

Look, dear, how like a band that binds
A lady's hair yon torrent winds!

"Right fair and bright it seemed?" I know.

"A pretty name the maiden had?"

Perhaps. When thou shalt older grow

Recall the song,—'tis not so bad,

And, read by thee in some far year,

Ah, may it then as bright appear!

Yes, child, remember, read and pray

For him who did not read to-day.

TELL ME

At God's winepress now, slow draining,

Dost thou taste unfinished wine

Blessing it, or uncomplaining,

Or in secret heart repine

For a draught long past attaining,

For a dreamèd cup divine?

Seem the deeper vision taught thee,

Thy sweet gifts which sanctified

What the leanest harvest brought thee,

Now as blest as dawns that died,

And the potter's hand that wrought thee,—

Pity's,—dear as aught beside?

On one road, in one dim region,

For one day of changing sky,—

Tell me, has thy heart's religion

Failed thee: is it best to lie

Calm, but silent, while in legion
Words that could be deeds go by?

As the bee seeks honey merely,—
Heedless of all else doth fly,
Loved, to love again sincerely,—
Souls like thine for this would sigh,—
Loving, to be loved as dearly,—
Though in gardens of the sky;

And it helps to think that, choosing
Now, thou would'st, for all the blame,
Little for thyself but losing,
Lift a sweeter face the same,
Wide-eyed, wistful, unrefusing,
Hiding not the tears that came.

Much it helps, where much is needing,
Thinking, if a secret thorn
That belovèd breast is bleeding,
'Tis the loveless live forlorn;
Thinking of low paths receding,—
Of a higher hope newborn.

EASTER

RUTH sat beside him, silent, moving not,
Her thoughts on him, and sometimes on the child,
Than she more fair and wise and wonderful,—
Sat in the dreary gleaming of the sun,
The sadness and the waiting of mid-morn,
By life, as by a breathless globe, shut in.

Near, from the eaves, the last of melting snow
Shed glittering drops o'er sepulchres of flowers.
Of these he thought,—how they ere long would
rise

Clear, holy spirits: he could see them now
As they would doff their dusty cerements.
Of these he thought, until one gleam of peace
Came, like a wandering sea-gull, lingering not.
At him, and chiefly at his eyes, he knew
She could not look. And when, full suddenly,
Loud bells with anguish shook the Easter morn,
He thought, perhaps her strength will not avail,
And so he called her name.

ASPHODELS

ON Saturn's rim hath stood my soul
To lasso comets with a thought
And glittering balls in play to roll;
But soon, with cosmic sorrow fraught,
It sighed again for earth's control,—
It longs to drink the breath of flowers
Again, in these love-haunted bowers.

A hand now sweeps the dusky lyre
Aerial,—first by notes possessed
More bright than crackling leaves on fire,
And then, like birds that hush to rest,
Deserting, one by one, the choir,—
'Tis thou, with fingers dripping balm,
O midnight, and thy radiant psalm!

That call of soul to soul!—oh, hear!—
From that sweet heaven adust with stars!

At last,—oh, come!—no more I fear
The rending of the veil that bars,—
Knowing the asphodels are near,—
The lilies and the asphodels
And one who close beside them dwells.

BACK FROM THE DESERT

Out of that desert did I lead the way
Where on love's manna, hiding, we had fed.
There for a thousand years we thought to stay,
Unfound, unsearched for, as the lonely dead.
There wert thou, in the night and in the day,
Beside me, O Belovèd,—day and night
No change e'er bringing save a new delight,—
Far, where the wings of grief could never fly,—
Far, where the future and the past were not.
But, in the midst of sweetness a deep sigh
Heard I, when sighs had been so long forgot.
I heard it, and I feared to ask thee why;
And thou could'st not have answered. Sad and
weak,
I pondered long, and found no word to speak,
But led thee forth into the darkening west.
I should have known, Belovèd, hearts like thine
Do crave a life of pleasure all divine,
And, blessing not, have never yet been blest.

HAST THOU FORGOTTEN?

THOU who not yet in Beatrice's train
Art numbered, but from scenes familiar lost

No less than she, I marvel dost thou mind
How, by thy primal innocence, and trust
As infantine, and by an answering care
Thy spirit clear was cherished?

Thou wert then

Forever turning that to drink which made
Thy life, as lily toward the light: less fresh
A new-leafed willow trailing wet with dew:
Gay as a duck, by distant thunder roused,
Fanning with wide-uplifted wings the air,
When the rain whips and whitens the black lake
And fitfully the gusts are in the trees.

Hast thou forgotten how thy heart approved
And welcome gave to duty, toil and care
For others,—how the touch of grosser thought
Grew painful, and to harm an insect's wing
Seemed harder than to suffer grievous wrong?

Hast thou forgotten, thou of those the last
Permitted for a time fair days to bless,
How, in the haven of a chosen dell,
Like a deep water was the peace? Through din
Of wheels and men, the city's wide unrest,
It left us not; and still the folding star
Was seen more exquisite, and evening
Settled more sweetly, and the world was kind.

The woods, the streets, the thought for others,—
these
Can never be unbeautiful again.

ALSO

BESIDE the desert toss their flames again
The kindling poppies in the breath of dawn.
The level sunbeams shimmer, and the plain
Is threaded with the morning song of birds.
I hear again, as friend's familiar words,
A thistle leaf that halts and scrambles on.

Within the watered fields, the yellow wheat:
Along their waters, poplars white and tall;
And overhead a sky serene and sweet
Stained by a crescent, like a flying bird:
A quiet deeper for the whisper heard
Of solace, by a passing breeze let fall.

And there a maid, like wheat and poppies fair,
Leadeth her sheep to water at a well.
The shepherds, resting in the shade, declare
'Tis Laban's daughter,—for a stranger youth
Who gazeth on her, eager seeks the truth;
And they, not knowing, of his uncle tell.

Now is a glad first service kindly done,—
The first of, oh! how many yet to be!
For her he rolls away the heavy stone
Shutting the spring; and thinks it not amiss
Of peace upon her cheek to press the kiss.
To tell his coming homeward hasteth she.

And then begin long waitings of a heart
Untainted, O Belovèd, like thine own,—

But, ah, the thought of thee,—of what thou art
And how it is with thee, so far away!
Also to thee shall seem but as a day
Twice seven years, though parted and alone,—

For that which I have seen within thine eyes
And thou in mine, and they so long ago,
Is changeless as the loves in Paradise,—
Primeval,—new,—eternal! Days and years
Shall mark it not, but only such pure tears
Of gladness or of sorrow as may flow.

SHADOWS

THE SUNS will set, the hills and plain
By stillness flooded be again;
White pigeons, greater flakes of snow,
Again will melt in evening's glow;
But when all wandering wings are fled,
What shall be left thee in their stead?
Thine eyes shall look and look again,
Thy heart not crave a look too plain
Lest these,—thy last,—should fade away
(They could not wholly fail to bless,)—
From roses of a better day
The shadows in thine emptiness.
But patience!—though no promise smile.
No self-deserting in thy need!
Be patient; let no thought or deed
Thy wounded heart defile.
So, take thy burden and,—farewell!
The worst of all thou could'st not know:

The goblet from thy hand that fell,
The day-dreams that forever go,
Must leave thee yet the pure delight
Which ever, through the longest night,
Makes sweet the tears that flow.

THE DELL

It is so long, old trees, it is so long,
Ye crouching flowers beside the path that speak
Remembered things together, and thou stream
O'erstrewn these with purity and light,—
It is so long!

When did I hear, from out beyond the wood,
The voice of one who called me as she came?
The squirrels stopped to listen, and the birds,
'Ere I could speak, made answer as she came,—
It is so long!

These saw her haste to greet me,—saw her hair,—
As thine, bright spirit of the waterfall,—
Trembling and tossed with gladness, in the noon
Of days too brief,—too brief, but all joy's own:
It is so long!

The dell,—ah me!—unchanged! The hermit nun,
Peace, for her refuge chose it. Slowly here
Unfolded, one by one, of that fair soul
What petaled thoughts and precious impulses!
It is so long!

Perhaps 'twas wise to bid her to forget,—
Perhaps she changed,—ah, would it had been
true!

Yet looks which once did greet me with delight
I shall not see, if we shall meet again,—
It is so long!

No!—I shall see, if I such eyes can bear,—
A look shall see,—O passionless, sweet child,
What shall I see, since all these lonely years,—
What hear within thy voice, if that can speak?—
It is so long!

IRANIAN REST

WHAT would'st thou, O my soul, would'st only see
New green, and that shall not again be brought
The cup of Indian summer, anguish fraught,—
Or leave the lonely darkness of the night
Though there walks beauty in her noon of might,
Her bird Iranian challenging afar
And hearkening an answer from some star,—
Or shun to hear the Master when he sings
Because of clouds and showers that lurk behind
The golden calms that brood upon his mind,
Nor think on her, a fair Rose radiant made
To comfort illness hopeless and afraid,
Nor on a faded bridal garment shown
With trembling secrecy to one alone?
Time o'er the minor chords will move his hands,
As hers the sea along the starlight sands,
As in long afternoons the faint wind clings
Amid the forest's many-bended strings;

And this is of earth's music, and must be
Or all be lost.

The sweet birds ring throughout the rocky vale
Their friendly answers or some fonder tale,—
A valley into which the jagged blue
Like to a broken bowl is falling through.
Here pale, thin poplars murmur to the stream
At moments, grudged from some delicious dream,
And in the palpitant air a crag is swung
Too near o'erhead, its horny forehead hung
With opal trinkets borrowed from a sky,
Which loves in shameless nakedness to lie:
By night, like beacons of terrestrial wars,
Burn on this crest the many-clustering stars.
Here ragged-robins, peeping through the wheat,
Wild hollyhocks and clover, dragon-flies,
Hanging adown their blue threads tanglewise,
And many an herb of little fame I greet,—
Old friends still faithful under these far skies:
They knew it would be lonely not to meet
Familiar faces here.

As evening dies,
Beside a rock volcanic I recline,
(For in such setting rough the burnished grain,
O'erripe, is striving now to stand, in vain,)
Hearing anear the limpid waters rush,
And drinking, now and then, aerial wine
From cups of white and yellow; for a bush
Doth roof me over thick with eglantine,—
To clasp and kiss which gentle cousin's charms
A young wild apple crooks his knotty arms.

And yellow-jackets, wasps and honey-bees
Have come to bring me other sweets than these
Whereon so drowsily they seem to feed,—
Sipped in fair gardens of Hesperides :
There many a gnawing worm, amid the leaves,
Of silken thought a precious coffin weaves,
Wherein the star-winged lustres dreaming lie.

All day serenely fair the breathing sky
More still than ever rested. Now, at eve,
A purple lily, tremulous and pale,
Below the stamen of as pale a star,
Stands, 'mid the jeweled hills, the silent vale.
And now ye, O ye griefs of other years,
Sunk in a rotting muck of sin and shame,
Folly, remorse and dross that shuns a name,
Rise, white and holy, washed in secret tears,—
Yea, purer than the flakes of snow that fly
Aloft, new-shaken from their windy sieve!

Why are ye here?—why beckon one who fled
So long, alas, so wearily, so far,—
Beyond where poet first upon a height
Set beacon, flashing to a distant hill
In blackness lost, the pure Promethean light,—
Through chasms, darker than man's spirit, fled,
Past whipping vines and where grim talons seize
The rocks in vain of long since vanished trees—
By swooning cliffs where mortal madness dies
And cataracts that quench pursuing cries?

Long there he gazed on our great mother's throes,
Self-sculptured, vast, and prayed such mightier

woes

(Tho' sad it were by loss alone to gain)
To blot all records,—all!—that so, new-born,
Unloved, unloving, lone he might remain,—
Lone, but not lonely,—brother to the rock
Which shoulders mountains with a tireless will
And parries with a laugh the lightning's shock,
When the black hurricane her wings hath spread,
And looks upon the years in silent scorn.

A lake of calm, deep-folded, lured him here,
Secure down-clambering, like a virgin rill,
Or as a deer when all the heights are still.
And lo! unlooked for and unwished, appear
Ye, the far-hidden, the forsaken,—yea,
Outraged and soiled and madly thrust away!
Yet, let it be in mockery ye come,
I hear such accents that I dare not say:
“Go!—leave me!”

From before mine eyes there falls
What is a darkness, but hath seemed a day;
Low voices, sweeter than of waterfalls
Decking white roses with their glittering spray,
Or thronging bees, when in the noon they hum
Through jasmine arbor and more patient make
A maiden at the loitering of the hours,
Awaken one who deemed himself awake,
To find in blossom long-forgotten flowers.
These pour from out their lucid urns of blue
Sweet incense, O ye holy ones, to you!

And ye, how kind!—and all those fears, how vain!
O thou Queen Sorrow!—thou with all the grace
Of new-made mother in thy sacred face,

Behold a dove, storm-parted, found again,
That hath no wish save near thee to remain!

NIGHT IN GULISTAN

'Tis here the fearless bulbul, with a song,
Alone dares brave the beauty of the night!
 He pauseth oft and long
Deep drafts to take of peace and of delight,
Checking the silence when 'tis grown too strong
 And rapturously bright,
Darkly enchambered in the silver trees,
Disdaining sleep for more luxurious ease.

Now through the nunnery of white blooms the sheen
Of locust, apple, orange-blossoms, all
 May's prelude trembles. Seen
By those thro' whom his loud, clear measures fall,
The shadows lighten, and the lights between
 Are living wings. The tall
Poplars beside the running waters keep
Watch near the pools wherein their brothers sleep.

FOLLOWING

THOU whose eyes still keep the blue
 Of a heaven beyond our ken,
Thou dost heavenly gates undo
 For thy melody, which then
Falleth soft o'er domes and towers
And o'er parchèd hearts, like showers,

For thy soul is tuned unto
Sounds that sleeping angels dream :
Tones like thine, from urns of blue,
Madder ages might redeem,
With their sad and sweet refrains
Waking what of tears remains.

Softly as her star the moon,
Or as sunset after rain,
Or as faith and hope full soon
Follow when buds wake again,
So the wandering world ere long
Follows thee and thy lone song.

SONG

COME with roses,—ring the bell !
Ring it well,—gay throngs are moving
Round the carriage, laughing, shoving.
What is life save only loving ?
Scatter roses,—ring the bell !

Bring ye lilies,—ring the bell !
Ring the bell,—fair lids are smarting,
Fair cheeks cold and fresh tears starting.
There's a death,—they call it parting,—
There's a death,—so ring its knell !

LADY

Do but let me live awhile,
Dainty lady free from guile,

Thou whose future and whose past
Trouble never, but each pain
Of another finds refrain
And is all the woe thou hast.

Let me stay, and have no fear,—
Evil never could come here;
Were it lost in this sweet place,
It would in thine own surprise
Share, and shrink and hide its face
From the light that round thee lies.

How thy laughter, Lady fine,
Lifts me to a joy like thine!—
As the soft Italian skies
Lift me, when the glad sun flings
('Mid the down of angels' wings)
Ladders from the realms divine.

Though no sisters of the faun,
Though no daughters of the dawn
Whom the drowsy flowers caress
For thy handmaids worthy be;
Yet the grass thy feet may press,—
Even the weeds are touched by thee.

Being from some radiant sphere,
Do but let me linger near,—
Me, with many a wound and stain.
For my dark night be a star!—
Light me,—bless me,—near or far,
None the worse for what I gain.

HANDS

BEHOLD yon picture overhead
Of life in Pozzuoli:
A woman sewing—by her bed
A shrine of virgin holy.
Comfort thence she long hath sought
(Hard her life and lowly).
Rest thee, dame, and pray awhile!
Tho' we passersby may smile,
Yet we pass more slowly.
Many a lady for thy cot
Gladly would forsake her lot,
If her jeweled hand, as thine
Might, in melancholy,
Rest in peace upon the shrine
Passed in Pozzuoli.

ECCE

GUIDO, thine Ecce Homo's face may tell
How high his faith has borne the Christian's art;
Thy brain and hand have wrought it wondrous well.
This Ecce Femina was by thy heart
All pitifully drawn,—as like, we know,
As that the judge who then could dare to slay
A trembling dove already wounded so
Did shrink from daily to his final day,—
His pain like this we suffer now,—for us
She punisheth,—one woman for them all.
O worthy Guido!—but we pray that thus
No Guidos more may our rude hearts appall;

But let our passing victims to the veil
In peace withdraw such patient looks and pale.

SERENE

He might have died and she, alas! lived on,
He might have left her to her grieving here,
Left one to whom, as woman, love was all.
He thinks it is as well that she is gone.
He who is left is dull,—even one so dear
Remembers little,—can but scarce recall
Her features,—any save the tender eyes
Wherein her soul, in all its beauty, lies.

He thinks 'tis well, since both their hearts have rest.
He thinks she was not for a world like this,—
A world unkind or mad, which will not see
Who are the good,—nay, even tho' the best.
'Twas sad he wakened from a dream of bliss,
Yet not so sad, for, after all, 'twas he;
For, ah! he thinks hath never left her eyes
That dream, but comforts her in Paradise.

LAZZARONE

WHERE the lazy lazzarone
Gulp their evening macaroni
Still the birds of black are flitting,
Weaving auguries as ever,
In a patient, slow endeavor,
Or on ruined columns sitting.

Jeered these lazy lazzarone
Cæsar in his glory car
When he flew the wild war eagle
Where the cloudy oceans are,—
Gazed and gaped thro' all the stages
Of the drama later ages
(When a priestly finger lifted
Bade yet larger scenes be shifted)
Played where he had played at war ;
Played at ruling far-off regions
Which no Cæsar's bloody legions
Saw, or ever dreamed so far ;
While these birds of black, but changing
For an old a newer column,
To and fro, in silent, solemn
Flight of augury, went ranging.

Nero and Savonarola,
Tarquin and Rienzi Cola,
Tarquin's Lucrece and the dame
Lucrece of another fame,
Laughter, license, love and tears
Twisting in and out the years ;
And these faithful birds through all
Auguring of good—not ills,
Weaving o'er thy deathless brow
Ever some new coronal
Fair as is the thin moon now
Come again to deck thy hills.

CYPRESS

THE cypress plumes, as well they may, in Rome
Mourn with a special beauty, and of all
Fairest, as should be, cluster round the tomb
Of one who heard their call.
Here sorrow, in her everlasting home,
His chant funereal
For Adonäis yet doth lean to hear
Whose echoes fainted on the singer's bier.

Ye seek all vainly for a third fair grave:
She doth not lie where such a heart should
rest—
She who so rashly and so fondly gave
The refuge of her breast
That lorn Actæon from his hounds to save;
But, slanting from the west,
The loving sunbeams linger on the grass
Above him,—then to Adonäis pass.

Twin spirits suckled in wild war by song,
And to a heedless generation given,
Sweetly they slumber! Here nor pain nor
wrong
May come. Their skiffs, far driven
Beyond the pathways which to ships belong
And by mad lightnings riven,
Here, underneath their loved Italian sky,
Together in earth's fairest haven lie.

THE TRYST OF ALKAIOS

'Tis the hour of love,—
Linger not, fair maiden.
Sappho, here, above,
All the boughs are laden
With flowers, for curtains of
My poet's home—my Aiden!

Sweet and clear the urn
Of thy silver singing,
Tears that bless and burn
To thy fond one bringing:
Love's best dreams return,
Round his wild heart clinging.

As the grapes from vines
Hang thy cluster'd tresses:
More than all their wines
Are thy fond caresses
When the love-light shines
O'er life's dark distresses.

Thy throat uttereth
Such a balmy breathing
As the cedar's breath
In the night wind seething,
Or that of flowers, their death
In new glories sheathing.

Brightly glows thine arm
As the beams that tan it;

Lightlier moves thy form
Than the airs that fan it;
Beauties rich and warm
(Like the ripe pomegranate)

Linger round thy mouth,
And in dizzy whirls
Pass, to where love's drouth
Thy soft eyelid furls
When the purpled South
Spells that conquer hurls.

Mænad!—from wild hymns
By love led apart,—
Dian!—(breast and limbs—
None of Dian's heart),
Through whom madly swims
Everything thou art,

Hail!—and farewell, care!
Joy now pain replaces:
O'er thy queenly air
Play now gentle graces,
As about thy hair
Light soft shadow chases.

Wondrous keen wit's spear
Now aside thou layest;
Wondrous sweet to hear
What full low thou sayest
When in love drawn near
Thou thy heart betrayest!

NIGHT IN THE DESERT

THOU hast seen the wondrous miracle when o'er us,
Where hung the sky and sun,
In the transfigured depths are set before us
The sweet stars every one,—

'Tis wondrous, as should further revelation
Transform or hide each star,
With our poor, fragile fleshly habitation,—
All things that round us are,—

And usher to our ken scenes yet more splendid
Where love, this love we share,
Should be by deeper harmonies attended
In yet serener air,—

Like trees we see in waters dimmed and broken,
But over straight and tall,
Should take a marvelous meaning, here unspoken,
Fair dreams fulfilling all.

WANDERING

HIS father's cot, in valley sheltered deep
And framed about with gently rustling leaves,
Haunts the tossed sailor's sleep;
A matted vine beneath a porch's eaves
Makes sad far birds, whose breasts in absence keep
A music which relieves:
Me the wild flock of mountains whence I came
Calls ever—elsewhere all is void or tame.

There the sleek beech is mottled o'er with light
And scaly, like a serpent, lifts the pine.
 'Mid dark green, burning bright,
I love to see the gum-tree's red leaf shine.
There sprawls the grape, with reckless waste of
 might;
 There moves the graceful line
Of cat or snake, swift death in beauty furl'd,
'Mid noxious herbs, the wildwood's underworld.

There on a royal couch of green to lie!
 Ah, there, while near obsequious trees should
 wave
 Their gorgeous fans, could I
 Yield to soft waters and grey rocks they lave,
To ladder-rungs of light that toward the sky
 Lift from the glimmering cave,—
Hear unrepining voices, feel kind eyes
Of some small poet, singing ere he flies!

THE DREAM OF RUTH

I

A SPLENDOR trembling in a pallid form
And therefrom tiptoed in the act to start,
But pausing, angel-wise, at sight of harm

To wounded creature, from the herd apart,—
So ran my dream. Ruth, silent as a flower,
Did look too long, too near, upon a heart

Which, little as a widowed bird, had power
To conjure hope,—whose morn and noon and night
Passed like the printless footsteps of an hour

Or shadow of a far cloud's dizzy flight
Which hastes o'er summer fields and leaves no trace.
She read what elder saw not,—she, a child,

To him an airy elf, whose laughing grace
Bespoke clear days by not one care defiled.
So, as a child, he kissed her on the stair

At bed-time, when she paused,—it seems he smiled
And, knowing not, upon her wayward hair,
Gently a consecrating hand let fall.

But soon the parting,—she to placid hall
Where kindly sisters kindness taught returned,
He to the strife for which, till then, he burned.

II

And then years passed,—he heard men call them
years,
He marked them little; and again they met,
Ruth still a child, with all that most endears

Of sweet and true and helpful. No regret
Within her heart's still precincts might abide,
But thoughts which made her poorer to forget.

More years, and lo! a wondrous maid was there,—
A rare, pale maiden; and the child had died.
Serener than the child's her look and air,

More prone, he thought, to laughter; and the rest
(When they and Ruth and he drew side by side)
Drank eagerly her song, her jest, her merry shout.

Tremor nor sigh might have her leave to say
She marked his presence. Into it and out
She came and went; and then passed on her way.

And she of all seemed youngest,—and most blest.
Young were her eyes, her smiles like opening
flowers.
Each day was cheated now of half its hours.

III

Well, be what will, the slowest years move on
And changes come. So Ruth, he knew, was
changed;
For she is coming, all her girl days done.

He saw,—he heard,—'twas not as fear arranged.
Forgotten peace was his, 'ere she was gone;
And many loved her who are now estranged.

But from her womanhood not yet was won
Her heart's lone secret,—more it never knew:
'Twas later guessed from broken words and few.

IV

There fell a noon; and in the garden slept
Tired summer, resting from maternal care
Of flowers full-grown. Beneath a tree they kept

A drowsy vigil. Bees were fumbling there,
Fretting the clover-blooms and cosmos tall.
Then Ruth her long-hid kindness could declare

(But scarce articulate were the words let fall),
How she would bring young life to patient eyes,—
How of her youth she strove to lend him all.

Then, pointing to some testy wasps that made
A meal of yellow apple, waits and tries
Again to speak; but, of more speech afraid,—
* * * * *

I dreamed still more; but do not bid me tell!
And stranger than the dream was my surprise,
And what in this dim waking world befell.

FOREVER!

A YOUTH who fled the city, all at war
And heartsick with town slavery and din,
Did stray into the wildwood long and far,
And loud he swore to dwell for aye therein
In lordly freedom. As he passed, he heard
A calm, uneven song, which filled far lanes
Of forest with the music of a bird,—
A low, but cheerful song, whose clear refrains
Perhaps a mate within her dark nest heard,—
A free and fearless song, whose clinging strains
His heartstrings first and then his footsteps drew,—
A sweet and careless song, like one that rang
Sometimes within a casement that he knew,
Sung by a maid unconscious that she sang.

Soon, homeward bound, he took with him along,—
And still his heart doth sing,—that careless song.

FOLLY

THOU knowest not the arrows
That are blown from poisoned tongues,
And thou knowest not the sorrows
Of the gentle, or their wrongs.
Turn thee back, thou foolish maiden,
From a pathway sharp with stones
Where the weary, overladen,
'Mid the vultures leave their bones.

“Nay, I reckon not of thy warning,
Tho' I call it not untrue:
Not in hope, nor yet in scorning,
Shall I do what I shall do.
Either with me or without me
Thou must walk with feet that bleed;
And I marvel thou canst doubt me:
I shall follow,—do thou lead.”

But what strength hast thou to wander
All the way that I must go?
Ah, poor child, I bid thee ponder
And an idle wish forego!
Thou couldst only, by thy weakness,
Hold me back or make me fall.
I have often praised thy meekness,
Now, farewell!—thy comrades call.

“Hear me once and hear me ever :
Well my feebleness I know ;
And I fear that I shall never
All thy hard way live to go ;
And I know, too, as thou sayest,
I shall harm thee with my need ;
But, persuade me as thou mayest,
I shall follow,—do thou lead.”

TWILIGHT

AH, Twilight, gentle spirit who arrayest
Thy weak limbs in a robe of dusky grey,
And every rare and pallid flower betrayest
To deck with tenderest hues the bier of day,
Leave thy sad task awhile, if so thou mayest,
Ah, beauteous mourner, stay !

Not yet thy dew-bath, lady, hast thou taken :
Come, cool those burning eyes and weary feet !
Not yet the firefly and the moon awaken,—
Not yet the swallow startleth, blithe and fleet.
Ah, thou who minglest for a heart forsaken
The bitter and the sweet,

Strike not that wretched bosom ! All thy sighing
Will rescue not his breath who lieth there :
Call thou no more upon the unreplying,
But with the living such wild sorrow share ;
At thy feet, in darkness they are lying
With loads too great to bear,—

At thy feet, with weary hands extended
To thee, that thou mayest take them in thine own!
In thine ear they murmur: "It is ended,—
We can no longer!"—in thine ear alone;
To thy mantle's hem their heads are bended,—
For thou wilt heed their moan!

Thou that art friend to such as have no other,
Whose hand doth heal the burning blush of
shame,
Ah, bring fresh airs, for many are that smother,
And counsel bring, for well thou knowest to tame
The wayward heart,—be patient, like a mother,
For they are much to blame.

FAREWELL

LEAVE me that squirrel dropping his loud hull,
Yon red-bird flaunting by in waistcoat fine,
This water-snake, from noonday ardors dull,
And these few,—other laurels all be thine!

I shall not lack for pomp,—a glittering spire
Of sunlight o'er me, some odd reverend trees
(Old friends that chide not, question not, nor tire),
A shroud imperial pricked with golden bees.

Go,—let me be! My heart in liquid peace
Lies like a trout. Yet tell me this alone:
Thy friend's brief hour hath brought some woe's
decrease,
Or, like a bird, lent music ere 'twas flown.

INGRATITUDE

YE vast companions of man's vaster mind,
Primeval habitants, of chaos born,
Whose inmost bowels man for gold hath torn,
Whose horny skin hath ripped that he might find
The still more precious wealth of golden grain,—
Ye who have been his bulwark when he fought
With beasts; his school where liberty was taught,
And fed his flocks in your most sacred fane;
For those things have ye little thanks,—no rest.
Yea, after this, the wandering poets glean:
These from your trembling blue, more thought
than seen,
Take further harvest, 'ere the drunken west
Kindles your tops to make a funeral pyre
For pale, dead day and sets the heavens on fire.

THE CRADLE-LAND

RUGGED and bare the pathless mountains rise,
Their jagged capes thrust out into the blue
Of heaven's serenest ocean. 'Neath me lies
(So poised a lighting eagle might undo)
Full many a vast, misshapen ball of stone,
Near-ripened for the hand of fate to pull;
Below, the gleaming of the sand alone
In billows rolled or lying tired and dull,—
Scenes where, with Job's lament, in verse began
Our paltry record as it yet remains.

And here the sorrows and the ways of man
Have altered little since. Below, the plains
Cry: "Vanity—all vanity!" Toward kindlier skies
The fainting traveler lifts imploring eyes.

BIRDS

SUBLIME as chaos at the dawn of peace,
Above, below, for distant eons wait
Sheer precipices, in unseen decrease
Still crumbling, like the fortunes of the
great.

Afar and lower, at the foot of all
The blinded desert writhes beneath the sun.
But overhead I hear the frequent call
Of birds which hither, thither sail and run,
By nothing save the joy of living driven;
And down the sunbeams, like a waterfall,
Their rippling song is poured from quivering
heaven

When ecstasies oppress beyond control,—
Sweet as the grace sent down to saintly soul,
Or calm unto a sinner's when forgiven.

HANDS INVISIBLE

THE sheep, as still as when the Grecian bard
Caressed them with the sweetness of his song,
Above thee lingered near a scanty yard
Of ruined pillar. This might once belong
To temple whither victors, battle-scarred,
With hymns to gods now dead were borne along.

The blows of time have not thy glory marred,
O Milo!—calm as in the quarry's womb
And fair as when grew pale the artist's brow,
By thee made wild! New risen from the tomb,
Thine arms no votary decks with April's bloom :
Forgetting pagan days, thou reachest now
Hands all unseen, in pity for the doom,
Not of old gods, but women sweet as thou.

STILL FAITHFUL

THE fairest marble ever artist's hand
Did kindle, stood where was, or may have been,
Great Sidon,—now 'mid turbaned Turks doth
stand,
To outlive Stamboul. Light they had not seen,—
Its Greeks and Persians,—many and many an age ;
But not for hearts like theirs hath lost its joy
This lusty life! for yet they haste to wage
Glad battle for their glorious Grecian boy
Or Dar-yous, mighty King of Kings, beside ;
Or, where the almost-winded deer doth fly
Those foes turned friends, on keen-limbed Arabs
ride.
Above the oblong marble's corners lie
Four sleepless lions ; but enough of fear
Casts beauty, tramping with her quivering spear.

NOTHING

TEMPLES sublime which long had lived to tell
New times the magic of their maker's wand,

From reckless Turkish and Venetian shell
Were called, when hopeless ruins, to withstand
The stroke of war; and wondrous works in gold
Or bronze soon tempted spoilers, ere the awe
Departed from the stories which they told,
Or sank beneath the ban of creed or law:
But thou, Andromache, thou poet's breath,—
Thou thing of naught,—dost linger by the side
Of Hector, ere he hastens to face death,
Thy cheek as fresh as when thou wert a bride:
Thy soft eye dropped upon his infant's hand
A tear not yet,—and never to be,—dried.

ELIZABETH

WHEN the news at length they brought,
With the pictures, letters,—sent
All unopened (thus they thought
More to please me,—kindly meant,)
Like a wounded beast I fought,
'Ere into my soul it went.

He was not the one to blame:
Women are deceivers all!
She ensnared him when he came,
She, though pictured tame and tall.
Would I might but know her name:
It is false,—they *could* recall!

With the foremost rode he forth,
On a steed as proud as he:
Oh, the strife of south and north!
Not a braver heart could be.

And he knew my beauty's worth,—
Liars,—no!—he loved but me!

Kind they call me,—careless all
For a selfish loss or gain,
Ready at a sorrow's call,
Claiming oft another's pain,—
Cheerful, too, whate'er befall;—
Tell me, does my beauty wane?—

Would he think me now as fair?
If he could not, would he find
Still a trace on brow or hair,—
Something left in heart or mind,
Something left in look or air?
Would it please,—they call me kind?

SWALLOWS

For you the romping stream doth leap
Huge boulders, and the lusty breeze
Blow bugle notes and shadows sweep
Refreshing billows through the trees,—
Ye vagabonds, whose trooping call
Makes heaven's blue bell ring musical.

But dreary now the garden pond
That waited through the sunny hours;
And desolate the trees beyond
The high wall, and the darkening flowers;
And lonelier still the silent sky,
But lonely more than all am I:

And, maybe for a childhood's day
Beside a stream in summer shade,
And maybe for the friendly way
They gossip near a love-vow made,
I linger as when strangers stand
With news from home on alien strand.

Ah, maybe these are spirit kin
Would lead still upward and afar
The wingèd thoughts that stir within
And pine and know not what they are,—
So near they pass us by and call
Back, as the deepening shadows fall.

GENTUCCA

YE wondrous histories in words not told,
Too tender to be touched!—of ye, not least,
Christ with his sisters,—Dante, thou with her,
The one that soothed thee, exiled and bereft,—
Her from whose heart alone, I think, thy soul
Drew what in many worlds it had not found,—
Not her of whom that other's chiding tells:
“Beware lest she, too, perish!” Leaves then turned
Between ye, of a story, copied down,—
This were a tale, indeed! With thine her name,—
I think she saw thee write it, and besought
With thine to have it live,—her name remains.
Did she not pray: “Great Master and dear friend,
If thou canst not go on, so fall the drops
Thou sayest my friendship brings thee, leave my
name

Unblotted there." "And some will understand,"
Did'st thou not answer, brushing tears away?

GLEANNING

UNVEILED, she claspeth now the dew
And sunrise in her sheaf,—
The foreign woman: soon she knew
Who felt a stranger's grief,—
Why barley stalks and not a few
Are left,—for whose relief.

He speaks,—behind her lashes then,
High billows lift and roll,
The seen, or guessed, the unconfessed
Exultance of her soul:
It leaves her steps unsure as when
Men walk in sleep's control.

Then in the hidden tears that flow
Now cradled hopes are gay,
Then, with her lip's reluctant bow,
Sweet thoughts in secret play,
Then on her cheeks, forbidden, blow
The fairest buds of May.

UNWEEDED

OH, blame him not, stranger, or softlier chide,
For the weeds,—for the flowers untended;
They tell him his fairy has gone to abide
In a garden than his more splendid.

Yes, he waters black stalks with a listless hand,
And the beds where the nettles possess them:
He is thinking how lilies would understand
When she tenderly leaned to caress them,—

How he'd hearken at eve to a faint, clear sound
(All the hearts of the roses atremble),
How he'd brush from before her whatever might
wound,
And the pain of her absence dissemble.

And now would he follow the print of her feet.,
Now only to him still showing,—
Ah, beware lest thou finish that work of the sleet
And the rain through the pathways blowing!

JUNE

THE loud cicada, scents of yellowing grass,
Limp rushes bent and lashing in the wave,
Thick-dropping leaves that round the dark pools
pass,
Attend fair June's swift progress to the grave,—

These and the jaded breeze, the yellow-coat,
The wasp, dull roses, many a fledgling bird,
And gaudy tangled weed. Lo, not remote,
Already are the woodland heralds heard!

Be patient, lorn Ophelia,—it is best:
Be calm,—be silent,—what is there to say?
Thou shalt, and, in some gardens of the blest,
Perhaps we, too, shall have another day.

Nor thou nor we have reaped, but we and thou
Much fragrance of white blossoms may recall,—
We have not reaped, but there are wages now
For those who may not gather in the fall.

SEARCH

THROUGHOUT the echoless palace of the night
I sent my soul upon an eager quest:
My soul returned 'ere yet the dawn was bright
And brought me home a dark and silent guest,—

One that did stare and in the threshold stood,
Casting a dim, still shadow where I lay,
Which sent a chill through all my bones and blood;
And there did stay, and there did mean to stay.

“What hast thou brought,” I said, “to one would
see
Where others see not,—feel what none may
feel,—

To him who wiser than his kind would be,—
All secrets of the quick and dead reveal?”

But my soul answered: “ ’Tis the soul of man
Would come to dwell with thee. No more, when
lone
Or neighborly, in peace, as they began,
Thy days shall run, but thou shalt hear the
groan

“Of generations. Thou hast but to say:
‘I for myself shall live,—to all else blind,’

This shape unwelcome from thy door away
Shall haste." I said: "'Tis late to look behind:

"Seek now within the chambers of the light."
Soon through my veins a peace, like pleasure,
fled,
For soon came one who kissed, as dawn the night,
That other, bending, like a rose, her head.

Beneath the kiss that darkness, trembling, grew
From foul to fair: I saw a brow of pain
By this made radiant. After, through and through
I rested, sending not my soul again.

MARIENGARN

THERE lies a cove, dim-lighted by the sun,
Within a twinkling sea,
Where round my rest come peering, one by one,
Birds (these its fishes be):
These through the antlered coral gleaming run,
Knowing small fear of me,—

Of one from human sunk and all that grieves,
Kin to the tribe that yells
Its minute joy when quietude deceives
And clear-heard lilies' bells,—
To all small folk that peep from curling leaves
And other like sea-shells.

There may the feet of conscience never come,—
Her terrible, sweet face:

Like nymphs of Venus dropping from the foam
The soft hours interlace
Their fingers, and through purple caverns roam,
A merry heedless chase.

There am I lord,—my kingdom and desires
Equal,—none else to please;
There, shining from afar, like wingèd fires,
In argosies the bees
Bring the soul freight from many gorgeous
Tyres,
And much-untraveled seas.

WORDS

HUNG quenched and white the harvest moon;
The quietude an owl awoke
Who signaled from his ancient oak;
Then did still forms the wood invade
Thro' vague half-lights in rustling glade;
Then, music-tranced, dim roses heard
The earliest vespers of a bird;
Then groups of meditating kine
Stood dripping wildwood's draughts divine;
Then, just beyond the senses' scope
Shone lands yet liege to faith and hope,
And that which lives in blades of grass
Did rise and like a spirit pass.

The wine-press of the afternoon
From golden grapes then pressed a wine
Which searched with joy these veins of mine,
Till once again that vision came,
O more than dear!—too much the same!—

The very look into my need
Sent from a heart fresh taught to bleed,—
The sigh like that which autumn heaves,
First looking on the waiting leaves;
The silence which thou could'st not break
With words there was no need to speak.

SONG

CHILDHOOD's royal idleness,
Youth's vast loneliness divine,
Sweeter womanly distress,
Then a stronger hand in thine,
Leading thee, and led, no less,
Down the golden morn's decline.

Graceful as new leaf at play,
Tender as the leaves that fall,
In thy breast the time was May
Through the seasons, one and all!
Now,—alas!—from far away
In the night I hear thee call.

ROCKS

THIS overshadowing tree, this hut, this dale
Shut from the desert, seeming void and still,
Speaks to my heart of one beyond our day.

It may be I remember,—if I dream,
The beings that inhabit gentle dreams

Are sisters to the form which here I see
As sweetly moving in these quiet scenes
As trembling shadow of a leaf in May.

'Twas here she lived,—here withered in the fall,
Leaving no like, as doth the frosted bloom
Shook by some lone, belated butterfly,—
Amid these silent rocks, which here no strife
Wage ever or foretell: unquiet waves
Roll not through them: they rest and unto rest,
Brief or more lasting, woo the weary soul.

Here, in her breast close-hiding all, she loved,—
In solitude here drooped, a mateless bird,—
Unsought, if not unloved, here lonely died;
Here drank, at times (I trust), in this still haunt,
An opiate from the glimmering bowl of PAN.
The fair young flower which yonder fading lies,
Slain by some envious spirit in despite,
Hath rendered up a life like hers,—so frail,
So clear, so exquisite! She seemed as one
Moon-kindled in the mist,—like, yet unlike,—
And, girt with weakness, strong.

No rude, no angry enemy prisoned here,
A being formed of light. No custom hard,
No law,—naught save her gentle will availed
To tear apart, when soul to soul grew near,
The mingling tendrils tipped with fire from
Heaven.

Her breast, in patience and in tenderness,—
But more in tenderness,—to pain she gave.
All-weighing and accepting all, and stern

Unto herself alone, she did but ask
From solitude that dreams intone the lute
So laid aside,—from kindly absence calm
For her,—and for another.

Here, full oft,
The friendly birds, inquisitive, drew nigh.
Such, and few others, knew and spoke with her.
Near country folk, no question venturing, made
Freely their calls for help and counsel. These
Graceful as a hawk oft saw her stand,
A Ruth within their fields; and resting them
At noon, in reverent whispers would surmise,
Not without sighing, more than half the truth.

CHALICES

FASHIONED from luminous, pure ores of thought,
I held a jeweled cup to drain to thee,—
A brimming cup with trembling nectar fraught,
Which at the lips did fade and cease to be.

Then, with the reaching of a leopard, stole
A fair arm, pressing that dark draught between
Which heals all ills,—but when I seized the bowl,
That also failed and could no more be seen.

The upper and the lower sphinx I see,
A serpent river and a midnight glare,
And thee beside the roses, dear,—and thee
Beside the roses I have brought thee there!

WATCHMAN

WATCHMAN, tell us of the night:
We are weary and would sleep,—
Tell us of the desert's end:
Is the dawning yet in sight?
Do the robbers roam, or sheep?
Does the foe before him send
Spies to plan the morrow's fight?

Here a formless shadow falls;
Here the moonlight on the plain
Showeth endless emptiness;
And the far-off fox that calls
Calls aloud in hungry pain,—
Telleth but his own distress,
And the great wide night appalls!

SPIRITS

“HAIL to thee, bright spirit!—whither now?
Methinks such rosy limbs and dewy hair
And that soft star which glitters on thy brow
Should be of dawn, were ever dawn so fair.
I follow evening as her bat, and yet
By some fair miracle, we here are met.”

“Below, how nation unto nation calls,
And, as by brother, in the one same tongue,
Is answered! Look!—the last dividing walls
Are tumbling fast, and wide all gateways flung!
Fair gleams of many a torch, once pale and rare,
Are mingling in new brightness! Everywhere

“Seems each man’s country! Yet the goal not
won!

Not east, not west, but upward to yon heights,
Thou who did’st send and I who led them on

Together now shall lead them. Wondrous lights
In undiscovered regions shall we find,
And darkness, like a valley, leave behind!”

EGYPTIAN

HAST thou plucked for thy bosom a flower, O Nile,
A flower to deck thee, or lured the lone feet
Of a maiden with subtle and serpentine guile,
With a whisper of life’s or of love’s deceit?

Is it hair that lies golden outspread on thy stream;
Are thy wavelets caressing a delicate cheek,
And, sweeter than open to love’s young dream,
Kind arms wide-unfolded and calm and meek?

Afloat in the shadow and nearing the light,
It may be a beautiful blossom and rare,
Far-borne from a palace,—let fall in delight
By a loved one, the kiss of her lover to share,—

By a woman who waited in sorrow and pain
For one who should come and should cover her
eyes
From the darkness of earth,—who was coming
again
To cover her heart from the pitiless skies,—

Or reached by thy wave in some shrine of the dead,
Where the faces that look from its kings of stone,
Like a deed once ended, a word once said,
Have no turning or change ever known,—

Where, in the moonlight, the palms scarce nod,
And the roar of the lion comes faint and far
To the sphinx, on her pedestal, lone as God,
And still as the lips of the Pharaohs are.

IRENE

Off on the rocks a cameo pale appears,
A calm, clear profile, in these silent woods,
Hid from the desert by encircling hills,
A face like one that held me, somewhere seen,
Grecian, long yellowed, sculptor's love or dream,
Now quite unknown both she and one who wrought
In prophecy of all the kindly grace
Which holds first glory in a later creed,—
In prophecy of this and her,—of her
Half shown on yon sheer grisly steep.
Down in the shallow pool about its foot
The scenes are eloquent of moods that once,
Through many changes of untroubled thought,
Familiar grew to these low forest roofs
As their own harmonies of light and shade,
When we, through aisles, sun-gilded, silent, green,
Made pathway to this weather-sculptured wall,
By aimless wanderings of a lonely bird
Scarce visited till then. That gentle hand
Then pressed away the branches where it seemed

That never slipped savage yet had crushed
The velvet carpets, stealing on his prey.
Then, while rapt noon was whispering to the soul
Half-way we paused, perhaps to watch some cloud,
In size and lightness like a floating swan,
Possess alone the heavens and all their blue.

Of leaves the fairest tints had, year by year,
Been spread upon this basin's gorgeous floor
And by its viewless water there subdued
To softer colors. Ruder wind passed not
The challenge of yon heights. No sight
Nor any sound told of the desert. These thin rills
Inaudibly lived on and, wandering, found,
Beneath low piles of black and yellow mould,
Their slow meandering way. Here, oftentimes,
We lingered till the dawning of the night
Had washed the earth with beauty,—yea, until
The rounded moon hung burning in the boughs
And stars that shone as lesser moons, too bright
For mortal gaze, embossed the dark above,
Whence, as from vestibule of Heaven, came down
Ineffable the glory.

Is all changed

Of such fair scenes, or changed alone for one
Who now again disturbs the woodland calm,—
Invades this realm no king may call his own
Nor any good man foreign,—where there lurks
No weary fool to say our hopes are vain,
But gentle dreams, long elsewhere withered,
shrunken,

Like truth disrobing in her secret dell,
Slow disentangle from the thorns of care,

And masks that hide us from ourselves alone
Fall to the earth?

Here many a fadeless hour
Whose solitude was touched with tender grace
And stillness with delight, for him lives on,
And eyes like night or ocean deeply blue,—
For him who saw each thought that thrilled thy
veins

And luminous mind, when slowly grew that form
A veil more treacherous as thy soul was made
By deeds of goodness fairer. Thou wert strong
And wise, and yet by some strange humor bent
To yield another worship absolute.

But when I tell of thee, lest with my life
Thy memory quite perish, come but cries,—
But idle stammerings come. The hearers look
In wondering silence which my heart doth pierce.
Ah, how could they be given to know thee now
By one who, blinded by unworthiness,
Thy thoughts, thy looks, thine actions,—all that
lies

In speech or silence, and thy words were few,
Could stoop to question even at thy side?
Seemed this to thee the madness that it was?
Are thoughts half told, or ill, or left unsaid
Here, that we harder strive to speak again?

The swinging jewel of the butterfly, the bee
Unspeculating, can these now be calm,
And thoughts of angels we call flowers,
As thou and they together in that time?
Each day sufficed thee and its single aim;

Wish hadst thou none, except to hear one voice
In proof that not for long went far from thee
His thoughts, who from thy side each day that
failed

Less willingly was parted.

Some bright drop
Morn-wakened, some frail form of frost not yet
Killed by the kisses waited eagerly,
Some pallid star absorbed, as through his prayer
The Indian,—even as these thou seemest now,—
Part of the dawn and with it borne away.

THERE

HEAVEN should I attain,
And one waiting be,
Could I bear again
In those eyes to see
Shadow of that pain
Wrought by words from me?

Does she there for this
Know how I repent?
Angels, for their bliss,
Do they true intent
Tell of words amiss,—
What the heart has meant?

Tell of wild heart-cries .
When, at length,—but so
Late!—we realize?
Saints from earth who go,

Strangers in the skies,
Do these tell,—they know!

Oft I spoke again,
But the true words died,
Tender accents slain
By negligence, not pride,
By ignorance,—by vain
Folly; but—they died!

Some there are shall go,
Raised and purified,—
Whiter made than snow,—
Meet to rest beside
Those mourned long below,—
Bridegroom there with bride;

But, howe'er unmeet,
Worst of sinners even,
Her they may not cheat
Out of half her Heaven,
But will let her greet
One, for her sake, shriven.

Shall I know her there?
Will she wait to see,
(Hid by virgins fair),
What she means to me?
If to look I dare
Will she hide to see?

Will she hold to me
Arms by love made weak,—

Let her bosom be
A tremble near my cheek,
That I feel and see
What she cannot speak?

TEARS

THE breezes lie and dream of her
Whom once they breathed so fondly on;
While this sweet hour, a gossamer
Entangled, loiters ere 'tis gone.
The roses and the lilies wait,—
I know not what the roses wait.

Aloft, where midnight sits and sings,
Of other notes that float and fail
I hear the many-murmuring wings.
Kind angels, soft as silken sail,
Draw near: like shadows, where I lie,
The angels come and linger nigh.

They come in answer to a prayer,—
Not mine!—and these great tears that fall
Upon my cheek are *her* despair,
Lone waiting in celestial hall.
Ah, me!—and have I yet to die
Who now so near her bosom lie?

The angels whisper: "On the earth
Is love,—but pain,—but sorrow's load:
What there is left of any worth
Save but the steps to her abode?"

The angels come to lead the way
For weary feet that faint and stray.

PERSIAN CHORDS

THE tree-rows forlorn
In September's still morn,
By the narrow straight way
Of the waters,—they stay
Like sheep to be shorn,
Or new nun when she kneels
(Ere the angels adorn)
In earth's bridal array.

The plane-tops at play,
Their slim plumes and shadows and white
In fanciful pictures unite.

Fondling the grasses,
And brightening the mould,
With a song sweet and old
The light water passes.

To plaster his cell,
Yellow-striped, the wild bee
Brings his jar to the well:
Bright and bustling is he.

Can ye dream what could be
That would make more complete.
One chord or note sweet
Of this earth's harmony?

The sound, now and then, now and then,
Of the stirring of leaves,
Left to silence again.

In the silence á memory weaves
And a spider as well.
Breaks the silence the scraping of leaves,
Slowly falling, as once one fell.

CHIL-CHIL-HA!

OUR many names for thee seem all to bless,
Fair bird to poets dear, man's neighbor nigh,
As "rondinella," of the "tristi lai,"

As "golondrina," "hirondelle," but less
Do others than thy Persian name caress,—
Not that such need of thee has Persia's sky,
Her barren hills and plains. Ah, hear that cry!
That "Chil-Chil" hear from wingèd loveliness:

No,—'tis because thy mother gave it thee,—
Because thy mother calls thee by it still.
With "Chil-Chil-Ha!" to summer o'er the sea
She led thee when our breeze began to chill.
How sad it sounded then! But now she calls
Thee back again, like honey-drops it falls!

NOCTURNE

THERE came, upon the middle point of night,
A vision which revisits not in vain.
Ye hear, where yonder reel the heat and light,

The desert weeds hoarse whisper for the rain
Whose loud, clear footsteps trample out the noon?
So had he prayed this dream might come again.

He was not sleeping, since beneath the moon
He knew the sands far gleaming, and, above,
The bare bright peaks. Yet round about him soon

Stood oak-trees and he heard a murmuring dove.
And there in summer robe of white was seen
One bending o'er a babe in anxious love.

Down in the fields, a partridge, perched serene,
His cry repeated from a topmost rail.
Quiet as his, it seemed, her heart had been

Save for one dread,—lest prayer should not avail
Nor tears of passionate fatherhood, but quite
Fruitless his nesting with a mate so frail.

To this had followed soon a keen delight,
The thousand cares which more than pleasures
 bless,
Long radiant hours of wakefulness by night.

But the scene alters,—pallid from distress,
Turning, she seeks—and fears—his thought to
 know.
Such is that vision,—good to him no less

(As being sacred, blest) for such its woe,—
Its coming like the rain's wide peacefulness
Revisiting the desert,—even so!

THE ROSE LAMENT

FULL-BOSOMED the rose,
But now, not warm
Nor wrapped in blest repose.
A dreadful harm
Has come, those eyes to close
Which charmed her so:—
Her love, her nightingale
Is lying low!

Silent the light leaves lie
Where now he sleeps;
Singing the rills go by
To twilight deeps;
Sadly the breezes sigh
For, ah! her breast
Bleeds as his own; but he
Is filled with rest.

No love was like to theirs
The gardens through;
Like her no flower wears
The morning dew;
No singer sung such airs
A heart to move,—
No, not unto her pine
The cooing dove.

The leaves, the light leaves fall
With rustling sweet;
Ye lilies, proud and tall,
Thou primrose neat,

Ye know, but know not all,—
Ye could not know
The love they shared, nor feel
Such red hearts' woe.

WHEREFORE?

HERE in the Persian desert, as we lie
Couched on a stony bed at set of sun,
Cool and at ease, the day's hard journey done,
I see a pallid flower atremble nigh,
Blue and as fair as laughing angel's eye.
It hangs a dainty earring on the dun,
Grizzled, and wrinkled rock, of many one
That with a titan visage threatens the sky.

Striving, I ponder over what can mean
This flower that followed flower in such a
clime,—
This last small birth to solitude and time.
Ah, now my puzzled spirit grows serene,
For clear the purpose of it all is seen:
To lend a drop of honey to my rhyme!

THE RUSSIAN WEDDING FEAST

I saw a painting once in far away
Old Russia,—picture of a wedding feast.
I saw it once, but of details the least
I see as plainly now,—the bright array

Of laughing dames and other guests as gay.

About the groaning board the mirth increased
As one more viand,—some hot, smoking beast,—
Was brought, upborne upon a massive tray.

But not for guests or mirth still lives the scene,

But one, white-satin-gowned, from these aside,
Near to the bridegroom standing,—ah, Irene!—

That face is so like thine, my spirit's bride:
And so I saw thee stand, with downcast eyes,
That day I passed the gates of Paradise!

INES

THE way, perhaps, was long,—too long for thee,
Perhaps for woman. If now turned aside
(Not ere that thrilled which now, perhaps, has
died),

So be it, and my blessing! Silent be,—
Be changed,—believe me changed.— An ebbing
tide

Perhaps away has swept thee, far and wide.

But word of blame, for one in days of old

So good and true,—this surely were not meet.
Then, like a queen, thy spirit poured its gold;

And, after, through the dark I heard thy feet
On the long path unwearied cadence hold,

Self-sure and strong one, though thy heart so
sweet.

Now, times there are when nothing may withstand

Such strength as yields this sorrow which doth
pine,—

Not even faith, wind-wrestling tree, like thine,
Far-searching for sweet waters in the sand!

Yet thou to whom I lisped what first I knew,
Thou, also, wert called woman (doubtless few
Like thee the heavens in their kindness lend);
Thou also, gentle one,—another, too,
And yet again another,—ah, my friend,
The faithfulness of these could know no end!

CHRISTINA

*“Quando verrai, cor mio,—
Quando,—ma quando?”*

Of thee I think, Christina, as of one
Clear-cut in rigid cameo,—delicate
As frailest porcelain, obdurate as fate,—
As one who willingly were changed to stone
Or in some prison-house were shut alone
For innocence, eluding love and hate,—
Would 'mid wild roses sigh that she must wait
A death that would not end all, like their own.

Sweet Sappho of the West, I think of thee
Also, as fuller of love's tenderness,
More learned in the lore of love's distress
Than that fair sister by the azure sea,—
Thou white-plumed bird of God, unnested, free,
Wistfully singing hymns to holiness!

EASE

THY great skill, Angelo, has taught decay
To wear a dignity to pride scarce known,
Where sits Lorenzo, tranquil, on his throne,
Regal and strong, an empire meet to sway:
Those two strange beings from the tomb away
Weakness have banished, mighty, naked shown,
In guise robustious taken for its own
By death, to claim a place within our day.

We vainly question Nature: limbs like these
She does not show: such outlines have been
brought
From where thy spirit through the curtain sees:—
Sculptor, and seer, and poet, thou hast wrought
Shapes from whose company we draw such ease
As young Lorenzo, musing there, has caught.

HOLINESS

THE candles burn by Raffaello's head;
Upon the stair his step is heard who brings
The Pope's last blessing, while a lady clings
To hope none shares. The solemn words are read
Which Mother Church assigns for one near dead.
Now, "La Madonna,"—"La Velata,"—flings
Her veil aside and, with low whisperings
And close caresses, leans above the bed.

"Until that woman shall be sent away
I enter not," the holy man declares.
They tear her forth, in spite of tears and prayers

And all the passing one has power to say.
No baker's daughter she, but one whose face
He made,—made him eternal by its grace.

RITRATTO D'INCOGNITO

AND now upon this wall to hang "unknown,"
A face so fair, such vesture, such a mien!
The famous artist let his best be seen
Of color, drawing, posture: hands alone
Cost many an anxious day. How proudly shown,
Now that some centuries have slid between,
This masterpiece! Yet surely must have been
For that fair sitter glory of his own.

But so he hangs here now. Well, after all,
What matter?—to his fellows he was great,
And to himself, 'tis clear, he was not small.
And of all thoughts that teased him soon or late
This was not one: that it could be his fate
To hang thus marked "unknown" upon a wall!

LA PINETA

I LOVE this whisper of the pines which saith:
"My needles die and fall, as there you see,
But I am changeless"; and I love to flee,—
But what is this the marsh-wind uttereth?
"For thee I gave my life,—no, not my death:
That were but little, but I gave for thee
(I pray you, set me down and let me be)
My days, my nights, almost my every breath!

“Yea, gave my sleeping and my waking dreams,—
All that I was or had, or yet might own,—
All,—all was given. Now the great gift seems
No gain for thee,—for me but loss and
wrong,—
Seems only loss,—yet how should I have known
The burden, else, of any deathless song!”

DOGWOOD

Now leads me back the winding way
To where with joy, on firm, sure feet,
I ran the glorious world to greet.
The dogwood blooms, a snow in May,
Lie scattered round, as then they lay;
Swift cedar-birds, head down, repeat
Their chatter in this shy retreat,
And chipmunks are, as then, at play.
Yes, girdling sheaves of slight avail,
Here nears itself the looping trail.
Ah, sunlit trees, new strung with rain!
And yonder, as in Sabbath rest,
The blue hills lie along the west,
And I,—I am a boy again!

MOTHER

O MOTHER, for thy slaughtered children wild,
Behold how peace, with lingering and mild,
Spreads o'er their hallowed sleep her cloak of
green.
Now, always brave, be bravely reconciled.

Lift up thy head and glorious sorrow's crown!
Cast from long-folded arms that sable gown!
Hast thou not children's children by thy side
Must bear worse burdens than their sires laid
down?

Look up and cherish him, the later son,
Nor deem that finished which is scarce begun.
I know, I know too well, what memories rise,
But what were Greece without the havoc done?

And why send forth the father? Was it not
To shield the son? Is this so soon forgot?
Or thinkest thou not worth thy care could be
This younger scion by such sire begot?

Look up and cheer him also to the field!
Far brighter guerdon to his arm shall yield
Than fired the heart of him who joyed to slay,
And homeward came upon his own red shield.

SONG

PLEASURE in the rising breaketh
Like the glittering billow's crest;
Riches waste or robber taketh;
Glory's thirst knows never rest;
And the worm that cankers waketh
Long in pallid wisdom's breast;

Hurt of love no potion healeth;—
So we yearn to reach a door

Star-embossed, whose gleam revealeth
Footprints pointing on before,—
Gain a height whence gladness peaaleth
From sweet voices stilled of yore.

THE STARRY QUEST

CANTO I

WHILE in the south all dawns yet opened drear,
And yet war's embers flashed autumnal flame,
Spoke a young soldier: "What is living here

Except not dying?"—One to whom soon came
(No, not to him, for first must end one's song),
The Indian Summer of the poet's fame.

Their lives so living, in the young heart's wrong,
Drew northward to the City sisters two,
And after came a youth, work-hunting long;

But for such stranger little seemed to do,—
One sister seeking health, one lending aid,
And by much sewing earning dollars few,—

Of evil in the future unafraid,
Not sighing for the present, poverty
For all of these two springs of comfort made,—

Not richer than their ruined folk to be
And to be roused, if but by need of bread.
The boy and maids apart, this youthful three

Where they should sleep and whence they might
be fed

Oft pondered. Ah! how life's few years might
bless

But for that word "apart," when all is said,

Guilty as parted of a world's distress!

At length so chanced it that the loneliest one
Saw the two others, one in feebleness

Led slowly toward a bench to take the sun.

And all the passers-by turned back to see,—
Women and men alike,—as he had done,

Much marveling who so fair a maid might be,
What perfect face showed over such poor gown,—
Perfect in charm, but for simplicity

Well suited to the garb of faded brown,
Which black, I think, in better days, had been.
The youth, not too far distant, sat him down,

And, hidden well, but with a vision keen,
By the heart quickened, eagerly beheld,—
As yet he dared to gaze,—that simple scene.

And many a day his anxious bosom swelled,
And many a wakeful night, because of one
From health by poverty, he feared, withheld.

And even then already was begun
The thought that stronger arm for maid so frail
Were fitter than a maid's to lean upon.

Clearly to church he heard the bells that call,
When he had seen these sisters go to pray;
But of the sermon heard, I think, not all.

There, near a gothic pillar, where the day
But very feebly reached,—a twilight place,—
Oft would he kneel to see them pass away:

The frail one beads in hand, some old white lace
Adorning wrist and neck with border thin
And hiding so much gown. But round the face

For him so burned a glory from within
That barely could its chiseled shape be seen.
Then cautious questions "who and whence?"—
begin,

And soon he learns the sisters fair to be
Natives of that same region whence he came,
Allied, like him, to strenuous rebeldry,

In that great strife which brought a brand of
shame
To those who could have turned the sword aside,
But unto some a fair, unfading name,

Till war, like single combat, shall have died.
The youth, of meagre aspect, ringlet hair,
(Chestnut its color), calm and blue-grey eyed,

Looked tenderly on all things sad or fair
And quietly on evils touching him.
One sister, of the world not well aware,

Worshipped the fairer and, with outlook dim,
Would come and go, unto the other's eyes
Entrusting all things, even life and limb.

Yet in all household business was she wise,
And to things daily needful led the way.
Upon these hearts no grip of jealousies;

One glowed with joy to hear the people say:
"How charming!" and the frailer, guiding, leant
As those who lean with love untainted may.

Likewise there came, upon home building bent,
A worthy widowed dame, in wisdom grey,
In children rich. To her these sisters went

In search of homelike place in which to stay.
And, as it chanced, that youth a garret small
Nearby had hired (he hoped therefor to pay),

And at this widow's house was wont to call
On daughters, boarders, cash-expecting friends,
Of northwardly migration, one and all;—

Some puffed with pride of family, such as tends
Upward, when drawn from parent's worthy deed
In war,—even war may lift from selfish ends;

And some whose pride was feigned, to fill the need
Of merit,—also some there were who stood
Discreetly silent of the past, no need

Esteeming as forgetfulness so good
For things by forbears done or left undone.
All this the wise old lady understood,

Herself discreetly silent, save to one,
That quiet youth, who sat and seemed to hear,
But somewhat freely let his fancies run.

Here first fate brought the fair frail sister near;
Here first she looked intently on his face;
Here first his few words fell upon her ear.

There is not any power in time or place
To hinder or delay when deep calls deep.
Seeing, he pitied her ill-looking case;

Her soul awoke, which long had lain asleep,
To find what seemed a friend well known of old,—
So dear a friend that finding made her weep.

Little saw he, for he had grown less bold
To gaze on that which most he wished to see.
And other wishes, new and manifold,

Were mixed with fear that no such joy could be
As giving welcome aid to one so fair.
Alas!—alas! he pondered, who was he,

And what was he, so high a hope to dare?
The youth thus doubted; women do not so.
And she had grown, in other scenes, aware

How strong her charms. Yet little did she know
How pure a well of feeling had been stirred,
Which toward her own clear being turned to flow.
Love she had known,—it spoke a strange new word.

* * * * *

Not yet quite thirty summers o'er the frame,
And o'er the heart, and o'er the well-stored mind,
Had passed for that fair sister, when there came,

Among the threads the busy fates unwind,
A golden one,—more summers than had flown
Above that youth of furtive looks and kind,—

Looks now of awe,—unlike what she had known
From ardent suitors many. These had seen
Her outward seeming; seeing this alone,

They yielded to the power, which makes a queen
Of whoso wields it. Wielding this had been
Among life's pleasures ever the most keen.

Her former wooers lacked the skill to stir
The inner woman, who apart was set,
Weighing their moods and motives as they were.

Now looked she up to one as never yet
To any,—not from weakness of the flesh
And humbled spirit,—in this youth she met

The other part of being; all afresh
Was born, as moth from darksome chrysalis,
Enkindled as a flower beneath the kiss

Of April morning and as dewy sweet,—
Yea, tender as a newmade mother is;
For in such moments maid and mother meet.

CANTO II

Some years; and then a presence, dimly shown,
Beckoned this youth, and, quite without his aid,
Swiftly he moved. Then words that seemed his
own,

Half willed by him, were spoken: "Unafraid,
From long familiar scenes I take my way,
But whom do I now follow, mystic maid,

"And shall I ever back return or stay?"
When to a thick mist-curtain drew they near
He strove his further going to delay.

"I'll pass no further!" with some little fear
These words were spoken; but he moved along,
And soon, beyond the curtain, saw appear

A meadow where of birds he heard such song
As in the spring, to one new-freed from care,
Sound their first tunings. "Thou hast known me
long

"And better than thy neighbors." "Lady fair,
For, tho' scarce visible, I well discern
Thy loveliness, I pray thy name declare."

"That one am I the poet sad and stern
Did worshipfully sing." With beatings fast
To see her face how then his heart did yearn!

But through his blood soon other accents passed,—
A voice that said: "At last," and silent grew;
And he in turn: "At last!—at last!—at last!"

He craved to bring the speaker into view,
But now could neither see. And, much in dread
No more to hear, he tried what one might do

To gain the better will of her who led,—
“Full many a time of how he fared through Hell
And through those other regions have I read.

But now, kind Lady, I would have thee tell
If thou didst love the poet on that sphere
Whence we have come and that which there be-
fell.”

“In life, too, we are spirits, as now here,—
A truth the Christian times have made more
plain,”—

“Where bide ye now together,—is it near

“To earth, or far o’er some ethereal main?”

“For one world were we formed,—in others dwell,
’Tis said, strange races; but for us ’twere vain

“To be ourselves and grow insensible
To what we know within our primal home,
To what is part of us, inwoven well

“Into our being. ’Neath yon starry dome
Brother and sister, friend with dearest friend,
So far as I have learned, shall rest and roam;

“Here love to fuller harmonies ascend;
Here scenes of past delight be visited,
In that same world, whose beauty without end

“In fragments thou hast known.” “Thus now,”
he said,
“But after death at once all clearly seen.”
“Indeed, not so,—to vision of the dead

“The whole is not revealed. With sight more keen,
With greater zest we look; but Paradise,
With naught to hope, could not for us have been.”

Then thinking he could profit by surprise,
Quickly he asked if he might see the one
Whose voice but now had blessed him. “Did
thine eyes

“Behold her ever, or the form alone
Which shut her from thee?” “Even there as here
With sound she touched me,—with an angel’s
tone.”

“I say not thou shalt gain a view more clear
Or thou shalt not.” “Already have been mine
Two great rewards,—if merit may appear

“In patient hope, in love,—perhaps like thine:
To hear her voice and know that mine she heard.”
Then spoke again that other (like strong wine

Ran through his being every smallest word):
“When none believed me there, for I had died,
And not a finger-tip or eyelid stirred,

“He lingered in the room and stood beside
And murmured: ‘In her bridals lying there, —
Fine robes I bought, tho poor, to see her pride

“ ‘When once, at least, fit raiment she might wear ;
By my command so shrouded. . . . Whisperings
Along the aisle ; and how the people stare !

“ ‘Upon my trembling arm her fingers cling,
Trembling, and from her cheek the rose has fled,
As still the wonder grows.—And that small ring

“ ‘Which seemed to wed us (here we are not wed,
But are betrothed) that, too, remains with her.’
Then divers idle things he, musing, said

“ ‘Of arts and hopes in Egypt’s night that were,—
Of spirit,—how a spark from formless glue
Fashions the eagle’s plume, the tiger’s fur,

“ ‘Of how my being from its cover drew :—
The praying lips, when all grew still beside,
Obedient to my will—‘A sign most true

“ ‘That she passed forth unchanged, whose form
had died.’
Those lips,—sweet keys whereon even yet could
play
The lingering player ! Ah, they will deride

“ ‘When I shall yearn to tell of her and say
How rare,—how more than magical she was :
‘Truly the heart deceives thee,—’tis its way.

“ ‘Like many another was thy bride.’ Alas !
‘Like many another was that form,—that face !’
But, looking in my love as in a glass,

“ ‘Will no one see,—ah me!—will no one trace
A far, faint, feeble image of that soul?’
Yet some will say at least: ‘In yon dark space

“ ‘A mighty splendor swims,—yea, such control
Tells of the power of such within the sky!’
And then a shadow o’er my pleasure stole;—

“I did him wrong. ‘He turns to leave,’ thought I.
I heard his footsteps, then the rustling stir
Of heavy curtains. He again drew nigh.

“Shone o’er my face and breast the moon—like
day;—
I fear I seemed more beautiful, so long
He lingered,—then the couch whereon I lay

“Was shaken with his sobs. I did him wrong.
Alas, poor heart! that yet must bear delay.”

CANTO III

Long silent he remained, remembering,
Until a fear came on him suddenly,
Thinking them gone, but still to hope would cling

And spoke again, in haste and stumblingly:
“Thy poet’s love, dear Lady, does but seem
A distant worship,—he appears to be

“As one who of thine eyes a fleeting gleam
Catches, when passing thee upon the way,
Scarce spoken to, beside the Arno’s stream,

“Or at some wedding feast, where thou art gay
And he, by thee unheeded, gazing,—this,—
No more but such as this he seems to say.

“Tell me, can this be all?—no lingering kiss
Upon thy fingers,—not one whispered word
Barbed as with fire and plumed with ecstasies?”

She answered: “To remember now has stirred
A rare delight to heavenly joy not wed.
Ah, me!—my name, near Arno’s wave, I heard,

“Where bowed I, gathering flowers. I would have
fled,
But something of command was in the voice,
Though reverent, and most reverently he said:

“‘I pray thee stay awhile.’ I had no choice,
For faint were grown my knees. He called my
name.
Not knowing whether I should dare rejoice

“I felt that nearer unto me he came,
Where tremblingly I bowed, in act to cull
Another flower,—then saw I, like a flame

“The flashing of his eyes,—so wonderful!
And after knew outstretched toward me a hand,
Beseechingly; and then my mind grew dull,

“So that but dimly I could understand.
Then he enfolded me, without consent,
And yet without an effort to withstand.

“What could I, then? So tenderly be bent,
So kind he seemed,—so manly, true, and strong!
Yes, many a secret hour together spent

“Was all the Heaven I wished.”—“And, from his
song,

I know 'twas all he wished.”—“Alas! not so!
He wandered from me and with grievous wrong

“Soiled his bright soul,—then for a friar would go,
Repenting deeply. Many a lonely prayer
I sent to Heaven, and much bitter woe

“I tasted, ere once more he came to share
Such scenes. The hours together passed again
He would have written of, but did not dare,

“The afterthought so filled him with its pain.
And then he shunned me,—sinned,—repented sore,
Striving against a sensuous bent in vain;

“Then, driven by wild repentance as before,
He came and bade a silent, sad farewell,
And for a time a friar's robe he wore.

“Soon grew I pale,—a cruel blighting fell
Upon my form and wasted it away.
He went to be a friar. They loved me well,

“My parents,—strove in life to make me stay,
Caused me to wed, and I resisted not,—
Alike to me the answer, yea or nay,

“Save for the solace to those loved ones brought,
To whom my death so soon must sorrow bring,—
Bring soon enough of sorrow, as I thought.”

She ceased, and he was silent, sorrowing.
“As soon as he had heard that I was wed,
Of such remorse he felt the cruel sting

“That long he lingered ill upon his bed,
Cursing the friars and the Church as well,
The faith,—even his Creator, it was said.

“He would have died, but that it so befell
A gentle friend, one Guido, medicine”—
She paused again; and he: “I pray thee tell

“For such an ill what herb or balm or wine?
This for a reason I should gladly learn.”
“The poet still would speak that name of mine

“He gives me, writing,—he would toss and turn,
Recalling ever his forsaken bride,
Reproaching her for doubting his return.

“How pale I found him, when I knelt beside!
And how he stared and pressed against his eyes
Poor bony fingers, thinking he had died

“Or else been cheated by such shows as rise
In fever-madness. But I touched his brow,”—
Again she would have ended, with deep sighs,

But he besought her to go on. "From now
His health grew stronger; with sweet hopes I fed
Of happier love to be,—I said not how,

"Nor when, nor where. And, back to health so
led,
How beautiful became his joyous face,
How like a bridegroom seemed he, newly wed!

"Vast grew, meanwhile, my need of heavenly grace
For the last time to look upon that sight
And on the path to joy my steps retrace."

"Ah, now, it seems, I understand aright
What in three reasons given he hides away,
Wherefore he will not of thy 'parting' write;

"Two reasons vain to lead men's thoughts astray,
And then this third one: 'It were shame should I
That which must clearly seem self-praising say.'

" 'She died for love of me,'—who will deny
This would be called self-praise, however meant?"
"When I was parting, very secretly

"This word by that same gentle friend I sent:
'In thee I lived,—for want of thee have died,—
Live thou, and know it is my firm intent

Always to linger near thee and to guide!'"

"And he lived on and builded there below
A shrine to which no dream, nor aught beside,

“Can be compared for splendor.” “Even so!
Of me alone his song,—by Hell’s wild glare
He strove contrasting loveliness to show;

“For him my presence hovers everywhere
The poets wander, growing more divine,
At length so glorious made that he can dare

“With Rachel, near the Virgin, to assign
A place for it among the highest there.”
“Ah, me,” her comrade sighed, “that heart of
thine
No more is waiting!—his no longer waits!”

CANTO IV

“Fair Lady, tell me somewhat of that child
By Dante well-beloved, when thou had’st died.”
“That little girl his widowed heart beguiled

“With pity for a man who wandered wide
And could not see his native land again.
With gentle hand, at times, his tears she dried.

“Ye seek her story from his pen in vain;—
Perhaps he feared that I should deem the less
His love for me, divided thus in twain:—

“My heart was not so natured. Blessedness
It gave to him to see in her young eyes,—
Or think he saw, kind looks such love express

“As those that watched the gates of Paradise:
His eyes to her as one’s from Heaven shone,
A banished angel’s, pining for the skies.—

“Her like I know,” the youth, in eager tone,
Not troubled now to think that other heard,
“Her like I knew, ere I was left so lone.

“Ah, Ruth, what memories of thee are stirred,
Whose love so mingled with thy thoughts of
Heaven
I seemed of Him a shadow dim and blurred

“Who leads us, if we will, or will not, even,
And those not least who think themselves have
led;
(Thine idol-worship may it be forgiven!)

“And thou to me a pious nun, who fled
The sisterhood, or was by Heaven assigned,
With kind, calm upward looks, well-comforted,

“To comfort one alone of all mankind.
And so it was that, knowing this thy dream,
To those calm looks some better right to find,

“I strove to be more like what thus did seem;
But other eyes than thine another sight
Beholding,—but no matter! When the gleam

“Of dawn awakes thee, and again, at night,
Knelt by thy lonely pillow, in thy prayer
Must yet remain some tremors of delight,

“Breathing my name and then thine own, more
fair;

And I, 'mid ruins of a hope deferred,
At times I, too, some little solace share,

“(No, not a hope,—too strong, alas, that word!)—
At times yet dream I hold against my breast,
Stilled all its throbbing, like a rescued bird,—

“Still as a statue, silent, full of rest,
A form set free from every change and fear;
Again in mine a gentle hand is pressed;

“I feel near mine a heart that should be near;
I shut within wet eyes, with kisses long,
A love I cannot bear,—it is too strong!”

* * * * *

These words into the youth's conception came
And slowly did he voice them, half aware
That he was speaking: “Ought I be to blame

“Or unforgiven, should again I dare
To hope, if not to end the dark eclipse
Which hides the one who waiteth for me there,

“At least to touch again her fingertips
Or press her white robe with a pious kiss?
(Ah, no! I could not wish for lips on lips,

“Unworthy as I am!).” Much more than this
He poured into that kindly lady's ear
Of pleading words, which went not all amiss.

She answered him: "Kneel down. She sitteth
near

And thou shalt hear her heart against thy cheek,
As first, she tells me, in a by-gone year

"Thou thus didst kneeling hear it. Kneel, and
seek

No further blessing now." Then, for a space,
He dwelt in ecstasy, nor dared to speak

Until his strong desire to see her face
O'ercame him quite. "Ah, gentle friend and kind,
Let now thy worth and hers my sins efface,

"And in my chastened love a reason find
To grant this other boon." "I, also, ask,"
The other said, "in fear lest, left behind

"So long, he may, if I should not unmask,
Forget my semblance and his love grow cold,—
He yet is only earthly,—it must task

"An earthly power the fading lines to hold."
"But think now further: if his stay be long
Yonder, is not it merciful that old

"And dim should grow thine image and less
strong

The conscious memory of the lost Irene?
If, in the pauses of some tender song,

"He drop a tear, recalling what has been,—
If, looking on the still, moonlighted grass,
He sighs as when his head, thy hands between,

“Lay thus against thy breast,—and if, alas!
He knows not why, but fresh un-mothered seems
The child within him, as the slow years pass,

“Is it not enough? He sees thee oft in dreams,
No doubt, too clearly!” Thus he answered her:
“With what old hours my inner vision teems,

“Hearing thy words! I pray thy gift defer!
Now dreading what I sought. Yet let me know
If I have kept her features as they were

“And if now changed from those I knew below.”
Then he described the wondrous lines and mien
And ended with,—“each lip a perfect bow.”

“If thus by thee in other places seen,
So is she here,—the same, yet not the same,
Unearthly now, though not from blemish clean.

“But come now, brother. Thou has heard the
name
Of Guido,—his who served me as a friend.
Still seeks he, as below, the poet’s fame,—

“So bids us come, to see and hear and mend
A Greek-style drama ‘Whiter made than Snow.’”
Thus Beatrice, seeking thus to end
The young man’s yearning, adding: “Let us go.”

* * * * *

“What thinkest of my drama?”—This from one
In tones of eager questioning. But the youth
Was lost in thought before the play was done

At wars there prophesied. "Can it be truth
That war will not now finish? In this day
Called modern, will men multiply the ruth

"Of savage forbears and the beasts of prey?
I cannot this believe unless I see."

"Ah, even now, alas, from far away

"There comes the sound of combat. Not as we
They slaughter now,—a hundred thousand fall,
Mowed bleeding down by hideous enginery."

These words of Guido that young heart appall
But leave still doubting. Beatrice spake:

"Do thou, Irene, go show to him,—not all,

"Nor half the truth, but gently to him break
Some little of the madness that is rife."

And soon a desert, level as a lake,

Outspread, where moonlight lay serene and life
Did seem forever into quiet passed.
Then, as he marveled, seeing naught of strife,

The lady's figure almost showed at last,—
Or so it seemed,—and seemed it that she wept
And strove to speak, but grief her tongue held
fast.

She pointed toward a little flower that slept
In coverlet of moonbeams wrapt; and there
Lay still and white (whereon he nearly stepped)

A young fair face, enriched with golden hair.
O'er many like they passed, and then beheld
A meagre lion leave his rocky lair

Beneath a hill of rock, whereon was spelled,
'Neath bas-reliefs of slaves and haughty kings
And prostrate kings, their locks by captors held:

"To-day and yesterday—to-morrow brings"—
But here the rock was broken.

Then there swept
An angel past them, swift upon the wing,
And then another, slower, who wept.

And looking down, they saw of tears the spring,—
They saw and heard. Far flash upon the night
The flames of battle. Loud the engines sing

The song in which the carrion birds delight:
A city burning on the left uphealed
In smoke and sparkles, and upon the right

Each moment ranks of luckless men were hurled
To Hades. As the cave-men made debate
So now in argument was met the world.

Savage on savage once again his hate
Unblushingly did vomit as of old
Beneath the still, sweet stars.

CANTO V

They heard the call of Beatrice near,
And, as they reached her saw, not her alone,
But one whose longed-for presence filled with fear

The youth, who whispered in a trembling tone:
“Not yet!—more slowly! Ah, I do not dare
To come near one who sits upon the throne,

“The prince of poets.” While he faltered there,
A cheerful voice and kind pronounced his name,—
’Twas Dante’s—not the wanderer’s whose stare

Tells ever of Caina’s smoke and flame,
But that of him Giotto limned,—as yet
(And now to be forever-more the same)

Unparted from the blessed one he met
By Arno’s wave. The voice seemed nowise new:
“My Bice told me how thy heart was set

“To learn if me she loved, which not a few
Have doubted (so new-comers say). As here
’Twould pain me, as on earth it wont to do,

“Some things to speak of, that she made all clear,
Spared me, my friend, and thee to see one weep
Whom now thou gazest on with awe and fear.”

Then praise upon his lady did he heap.
So kind the poet that it was not long
Ere one made calmer, found it hard to keep

From asking questions, as: "Can it be wrong
To wage defensive war?" "Ah, knowest thou not
How seldom will a man, enraged and strong,

"Hurl blows upon another whom he sought
And unresisting finds, though unafraid?
Not coward fear the gentle master taught,

"But courage suited to that lofty grade
Toward which he wishes all mankind to strain.
I marvel now to think what joy it made

"To slay my fellow beings." "But in vain,
It seems, the master's teaching." "Nay, not so,
The upward striving way, through grief and pain

"Is best,—it were not well no change to know
From worse to better, as the days go by.
Through fear and strife and even crime we grow:

"In rest and peace to linger is to die."
"Five poets in the days thy day before
Thou numberest, poet. Pray thee, tell me why

"So few are poets and so many more
Great souls have other powers?" "Even here
I know not how, or whence, or through what door

"A vision visits me. I find it near,
Perhaps a wondrous one that makes me quail,
Filled with humility and doubt and fear,

“Like Mary when the angel came to hail
And promise greater things. So, therefore, this
Which thou demandest—why the poets fail!—

“How should I tell thee?—why earth’s woe and
bliss
Through ages yield an inarticulate cry?
It is a question far more dark, I wis,

“Because so little bars from rivalry,—
Not foreign speech,—that for no poem take
Which may not moult its plumes and keep the sky.

“I, too, had failed you if a sad mistake
Had stood. Ah, me! one morn beside a bay
I plucked an ivy leaf for poet’s sake

“Who sought the old, but wandered from the way
And stumbled on the new, the dimly shown,—
The hardly come as yet. ‘Ah, well a day!’

“He sighed, of Homer thinking, him alone.
‘Alas! How far mine leaves the Master’s song!’
And would, in his despair, have burned his own.

“He scorned his tale of Dido and her wrong,—
Her sacrifice, not knowing he had sung,
Not for walled towns of what to these belong,—

“Not joy to raise at spoil from corpses wrung,
But to an ear unawakened yet to hear”—
The youth, forgetting shame, these words outflung :

“Sung to the deep heart of a distant world,
A chaunt caught up again in tones more clear
By one who sang of Hell’s two lovers whirled

“Together—still together,—nor could bear
To part them for a moment—even there!”

CANTO VI

The poet of the youth inquiry made
If yet his bones to Florence had been sent
Or left in exile, where they down were laid.

“Sorely, it seems, the Florentines repent,”
The young man answered. “Often have they tried
To bring the sister city to relent

“Which latest harbored thee,—forsaking pride,
Have humbly, eloquently, begged and chidden.
The wrath of dreaded power by monks defied,

“A century and more by these were hidden
The sacred relics, when by pope’s decree
Their giving up to Florence had been bidden.

“But, poet, what can matter now to thee
The resting-place of some few shreds of dust,—
Now thou hast put on immortality?”

“Long exiled while I lived, by laws unjust,
From city unto city doomed to roam,
Even here I have not lost the hope and trust

“That, soon or late, at last the day will come
When whatso little may of me remain
Will rest in Florence, my belovèd home.

“But still I question those who come in vain.”
Then silence,—then ere long, like drifting haze
Slowly toward them drew along the plain

White spirits, opening wide eyes of amaze,
Distincter growing. Endless seemed the throng.
Upon the foremost Dante fixed his gaze

And: “Who are ye? I think I am not wrong
In saying ye are newly from the war
Which rages yonder.” “I, myself, belong

“Unto the Guard Imperial. See this star!”
He pointed to his breast as though he deemed
He wore one there. “I know not where we are,

But I must hasten to the front.” He dreamed
Of facing death, a gate already passed.
Still in his eye heroic courage beamed.

“On! On!” he shouted, “Victory at last!”
The poet stopped him with a look austere,
And questioned: “Whither, my new friend, so
fast?”

“To Paris! Paris! do not hold me here!”
“Thy going now must have another end.
Awake!—Awake! A soldier without fear,

“Thy part, as mine at Campaldino, friend,
Was acted well, I know.” Then slowly fell
The earthliness, and slower did mend

The power of vision, till were visible
The flowery meads and white-robed ones that grace,
Reclining there, the banks of asphodel.

Two spirits, arm in arm, drew near apace
From these, whom Dante greeted with a smile,
Seeing contentment glowing in each face.

They lingered near but for a little while,
Then passed beyond. The knowledge who were
these

The youth long sought from others to beguile

And from Irene at last the truth did tease:
“Those two are lovers now within the sky
Who others yonder strove in vain to please,

“So wide apart from theirs their natures lie,
Though excellent, in their own ways, they were.
The poet’s Gemma one (now knowest thou why

“We halted in our speech when asked of her),
The other he who called our Bice bride.”
With shame the young man’s being was astir,

But soon she calmed him: “After we have died
Each knows the mate for each. But there below,
Alas! not known, or walls of stone divide,

“Or Heaven of one enamored soon doth grow.”
Then neared two others, having eyes for none
But for each other, loitering and slow,

The one of manly beauty and the one
Fair as an angel, tremulous and pale,
Remembrance in her air and in the tone

With which she named “Paolo,”—nor did fail
The watching youth to know them. With a cry
He strove to stop them, but to no avail.

Then passed Giotto and Casella by:
And after these two women slowly came,
And Irene whispered as they drew more nigh:

“Behold her coming now whose gentle name
Thou givest one thou lovest,—what kind eyes!
With her is Rachel, not so slight of frame,

More queenly poised her head, more matron-wise
Her movements.” “Dreamed I from my earliest
days
Of Ruth,—this Ruth and of her sweet replies.
The other Ruth her like in all her ways!”

CANTO VII

The youth was willing, almost glad, it seemed,
To rest without the power to look on one
Of seeing whom again he long had dreamed.

But after, frequent sighings were begun,
Wherefrom and from vain looks around him sent
His pain was known. Then she from Bice won

Permission to relieve. Full swiftly went
The two together through the darkened air.
Above their flight the dusky firmament

Was littered thick with stars: and everywhere
Was silentness, until a cock did crow.
Scenes looked familiar then, but strangely fair.

A park within a city. "Dost thou know
That bench?" she asked then, leading him the way.
He wist not whether it was joy or woe

Shot through him, sharp with thoughts of yester-
day.

"And knowest thou yon barbarian, vain and tall,
Upon whose head and martial proud array

"The sparrows chatter when the shadows fall?
And knowest yon massive steps that lead a boy
At evening from his books, and dost recall

"How two sat late, aware of no annoy
From stony hardness till was green the grass?
Ah, deem not of another kind the joy

"In Paradise! Of that the bounds ye pass
And know it not: and longer might remain
If wiselier willed. But, as ye are, alas!

“Awhile must wait, your portions dashed with
pain.”

Then, close beside him, she withdrew her veil;
And, with their hearts o’erflowing, once again
Silent they lingered till the stars grew pale!

* * * * *

While ’neath a shade they sit, they overhear
The voice of Beatrice call afar,
Who, ever as she calls, is drawing near,

But them not calling. As the evening star
Serene and fair, she rose upon their view
From the low meadow, where the lilies are,

Oft pausing to look back, as lovers do.
“The hour is come which endeth here thy
stay.”
So spake, as from the air, which radiant grew,

A voice exceeding sweet, in accents gay.
Then Beatrice knelt and bowed her head
And questioned: “Is it *must* or is it *may*?”

“Already grows it late,” the other said.
“For long hast thou been worthy,—it is late.”
“But whither go we two, twice over dead,—

“What region lies beyond the second gate?
We two are well content with what is known.”
“Of two I spake not, for the one must wait.”

“But must I surely go and go alone?”
The poet near had drawn, and all had heard
And hears the answer: “Ages now have flown,

“For years mistaken, waiting for this word.
’Twere pitiful more ages here to spend,—
Yea, sicken wouldst thou soon of hope deferred.

“Yet on thy ‘yes’ or ‘no’ does all depend.”
Then thus the poet: “Haste thee now and go,
So that my stay here may more quickly end:

“For I shall strive the harder here below
For right to pass on to the better day.”
But Beatrice gave her answer: “No!”

And would not be persuaded, or obey.
When ceased the radiance, nor was heard again
The angel voice, the poet’s heart gave ’way,

And he forbore not to confess the strain
It cost to utter thus a new farewell,
And how rejoiced to find his words were vain.

Silent, they wept. Then wings grew audible,
As of a honey bird:—“When there I told,
Some little adding, that which here befell,

“And begged for other future to unfold,
’Twas given me: poet, for thy sacrifice
Thou, too, mayst go, and boundaries that hold

“Shall never part your steps through Paradise.”
Then cried Irene: “Alas, how much this pains!
I long have feared such parting in the skies.”

But Beatrice: “Not till all the stains
From thee and more beside are washed away,
Not while a single one of those remains

“Who much have loved us shall I end my stay.”
“Ah, me!—so one at will may wait on here!”
Thus spake Irene . . .

NEAR

I FOUND me near thee whom not walls divide,
Near to thee yesterday, at set of sun;
Near to that face I might not look upon;
Near to those hands by mercies sanctified;
Near to the voice for which my spirit cried.
I strove against the wrestling foe, and won.
A hand upon the latch, a Heaven begun,
Then footsteps,—then the long years,—turned
aside.

For thine is now what I must quite forego,
A good I may not share, who share its cost,—
I trust,—I think,—yea, surely this is so!
Calmness is thine,—no longer tempest-tost,
Forgetfulness,—a blessèd Lethe crossed,
I trust,—I doubt not,—ah, could I but know!

IN THE GARDEN

HOPE was budding, oh, so brightly!
Now its fallen petals nightly
 With fresh tears are wet;
Love was in full bloom, but faintly
Be that said: the word is saintly
 To one bosom yet.
But one flower grows ever fairer,
 Fair and tall,
Making all the garden sharer
 Of its odor sweet.
And I wonder and I wonder
Now, with spirits torn asunder,
 Still may pathways meet!—
If each comes to dream and ponder,—
If there is, yet unforbidden,
One fair shrine in common, hidden
 By a friendly wall,—
An altar taper-lit with roses,
Where a sacrifice reposes?

APRIL

Go, rot within your darkling beds,—there lie,
 Perhaps to rise, transfigured, in far dreams:
For I would watch low branches tease the streams
With dropping spores,—see new-come swallows
fly,—

Would learn what sweets the secret wildwood
flowers
Pour from their carven chalices again,—
Would with still meadows taste the breath of
rain
While unforsaken by the sunlit hours.

Nor thou, nor these, can daunt me, thou pale
Past,—
Not me!—but ah, there is a tenderer breast,—
Oh, be of mine,—of only mine,—the guest,—
Not hers who came the gentlest and the last!

My fancies dance like daisies there at play:
Believe me, broken hearts I laugh to scorn;
But spare thou her,—the silly women mourn,—
If I shed tears, so doth an April day.

THE RETURN

ONCE more they come, the robin and the wren;
The humming-bird is dodging by again;
Again with rippling laughter ring the showers;
Again earth signals back to heaven with flowers.

But thou returnest not: no more I see
Those young eyes brightening at the sight of me,
Though every nearing woman's face deceives
A heart that all too readily believes.

They are all back,—the years so long gone by,
The waits, the meetings, every tear, each sigh;

The toilings upward in hard broken ways
Toward that still height whereon perfection stays.

The oriole drops like sunlight through the trees,
His nesting mate to cheer with melodies;
The blackbirds clamor once again; the dove
In the dark oak-tree coos again her love.

Child of my heart's travail, so timely sent,
Almost with peace to bless me and content,
Almost with hope, and make me half forget,—
Ah, do not wrong thy soul with one regret!

THE GUITAR

THIS life were empty should I lose the creed
That thou still dwellest in a realm once ours,—
That dreams there mine have been as rotting seed,
And thine been, one by one, like opening flowers.

Still in my heart the merry laughter rings,
Which set the birds to singing in our wood;
Still do I hear thy fingers touch the strings
Faintly,—sufficing in our solitude.

And that embrace in which two spirits met
And lingered, lest the parting word be said,
The blessedness of that lives round me yet,—
Yet on my arm the glory of thy head!

BREAD

A RING too fragile and too thin he wears,
Not fashioned for a man, nor one full-grown
To womanhood, wherefrom, as it appears,
The set has fallen,—they say a simple stone.
(I nothing know save what the neighbors tell.)
They say the years are many that have flown
Since from a coverlet whereon it fell
He lifted it and took it for his own.

The hand which such a ring as that has known
Should have slim fingers, dainty, delicate,
Have nerves that with emotion throb and thrill,
Or, maybe, lie for hours soothed and still
The while a certain footstep soundeth nigh,—
Should be of one far wiser than her years,
Whom beauty of a thought would move to tears,—
Should be of one who, all the livelong day
Could sit within one's presence, while she read,
Arousing only when that passed away
(Like him who woke when ceased the thrushes'
lay),
Brought back, it may be, from some wondrous
dream
Of antique heroes or of those who seem
More neighborlike, within the land of Fay,
Yet ever ready, dreaming still, to note
If he might turn to her from what he wrote.

A woman there, to dream of dreamers blind,
Would shadowlike attend, ofttimes in dread
Of Angels,—patient wait with meat and bread

To press on lips reluctant,—made thus kind
By love for these and one beyond the west,—
A woman of all womanry the best.

SONG ✓

AMONG the lilies of an Easter morn
A loveliest one,
Torn from the clinging stem, to lie forlorn
Till day be done.

Among the stars that make less dark our night
A star that falls.
Fairest it shone, but soon was quenched its
light.
From glimmering walls,
Athwart the cries that mark the wild-fowl's
flight,
A voice that calls!

PRAYER

ON the cover, motionless,
A weak and weary hand,—my own,—
Has now let fall a hand more feeble:
Motion in the lips alone,—
Moved in prayer I cannot hear,—
Heard, I doubt not, by the one
Waiting with a welcome near
Till prayer be done!

SONG

“WHEN the grace of seeding grass
Shoots me with a slender bow,
Makes me sigh a long ‘Alas!’
What it is I fain would know?

“I would know what throbbing glows,
Melts and pours a ruddy stream
From the splendor of the rose,—
Is it sooth, or does it seem?

“Burns it long within my brain?
Does it perish with the seeing?”
It will evermore remain
Part and substance of thy being.

THE BENCH

LONE on a bench within the public square
(Rent-free the bench and sunshine,—well for
him!),

A man sat gazing, with bleared eyes and dim.
Upon his face were lines of sin and care.
And soon, behind him, one with curling hair
Uprose, a young man, straight and tall and fair.
I waited, though 'twas hardly my affair.
“What! art thou here in such a sorry plight;
I little thought to see thee come to this.
I doubt thou hast whereon to sleep to-night,
And surely none will greet thee with a kiss.
How oft they gave good warning,—held the light,—
And yet the road thou didst contrive to miss.”

The old man brushed some moisture from his eye
And slowly answered: "Every man is one,—
Unlike all other men beneath the sun;
And who and what he is a mystery
To him, unriddled as the years go by:
He thumbs his primer when the sands have run.
Then why reproach me?" "Thou hast me be-
trayed,—
Me wrecked,—me ruined,—wasted,—quite unmade!
I know that lump of wretchedness,—'tis I!"

SERENADE

My Lady, sleep!
And may the influence of the odorous pines
Thy lithe limbs steep!
Slowly, at length, the pleiad group declines:
Slow billows leap:
And drowsy nod the flowers at their prayers;
Faint is the breathing of the wandering airs,
The cricket's cheep!

My Lady, sleep!
Sleep while the night her silver beads shall tell,
Her vigil keep!
Sleep till the swallow shall make audible
The dawn's glad sweep!
Sleep till the bees within the lilies lie,
Then with the morning-glory close thine eye,
Again in sleep!

No! No! Arise!
Too like to death,—too like to death is sleep!
My faint heart cries;
Too much like death's its silent shadows creep;
Too still one lies!
Is this remembrance or but fear that speaks?—
“At parting time the roses left her cheeks,
The stars her eyes.”

THOU KNOWEST THE PLACE

THOU knowest where I wait,—not far, and yet
A thousand ages from the noisy streets
And all the anxious faces there one meets,—
Where tresses of long grass are trailing wet
Within a spring as clear as from regret
The memory of our love,—where noonday heats
Draw near, but enter not,—where softly beats
An aery surf the slumbering leaves to fret.

Thou whom young dawns have nursed and spirits
clear
That dwell in deep, unviolated woods
Where never sigh hath stained the solitudes,
Almost thy crackling footstep now I hear
(But that the cardinal's loud song intrudes),
Almost thy white skirts whispering: “See who's
near!”

Come, quickly come! for I have waited long.
Haste! for my spirit waxeth much forlorn
Beside grey bones, of all that clad them shorn,

Laid at full length the laurel boughs among,—
A lordly being, even in ruin strong,
Now from all native semblance stripped and
worn:—
Once a proud pine, rejoicing with the morn,
Stirring the birds to ever merrier song.

Come, let us mourn him, though not newly dead!
Come, for the squirrels and the birds are come.
He is arrayed now—sumac at his head
And at his feet; the serious beetles hum
A requiem over him; silk-vestmented,
The choired cicadas chaunt:—Should we be
dumb?

SONG

COME with me, sweet,—here quiet lies
In serpentine, sun-spotted ways;
Expectancy in trees and skies—
Expectance, though the swallow flies
As through the first of summer days,
Though idly yet the chipmunk plays,
And still as loud the partridge cries.

Come with me, as of old you came;
Upon lone years the gateway close!
These woods, are not they quite the same,
And we almost unchanged as those?
There,—almost,—is the same wild rose
You touched the first great day we came.

Here lies, as then, yon antlered wreck,
Its semblance to an oak-tree gone;
As then, the playful shadows fleck
That weather-scriptured wall of stone;
As patiently as then the trees,
Long waiting, fill their destinies;
Still, writ in blooms on mouldering sod,
Is tendered us the truce of God,
Accepting which, dear heart, we two
Again may Paradise renew.

THE GOLDEN HOUR

Now the corn-shock roofs him o'er
And the field-mouse,—filled his store,—
Thinks of ease;
Now, though humming-birds are darting,
Swallows muster for departing
Over seas.

Round thee now seems peace descending,
Seems a holy presence bending
From above;
Seems in thy calm face the sweetness
Of a life wrought to completeness
By its love.

On the porch the red leaf falleth;
Now no more the partridge calleth
To his mate,
Telling her no danger waiteth,—
One same tale of cheer relateth
Soon and late.

Tell me, in the time hereafter,
Shall my lot bring sighs or laughter?

Thou canst say!

For thou holdest in thy fingers
All of hope for me that lingers.

Tell me, pray!

Graceful as tall seeded grasses;
Richer every day that passes

In heart's gold,—

Not the child that I remember,
Now the woman of September

I behold!

Through to me what dreary days
Ever parted were our ways,—

Thine more fair.

Fleshed as rarest ripened flower,
Spirit of this radiant hour,

Heed my prayer!

Still the roses shrinking, shifting,
In the breeze their heads are lifting

After rain;

Still the bumble-bees are tumbling
From the hollyhocks and bumping

In again.

All of summer's wealth unfolden,
Now the apples, rotting, golden,

Faint and fall;

In the heat a breath of chillness
And a sad, prophetic stillness

Over all.

In thine eye a tear is trembling,—
On thy lips a word, dissembling
 Thy sweet pain;
But in vain thy tongue conceals it,
For thy very silence peals it
 Forth again.

L'ADULTERA

Archangel.

BROTHERS, my wishes did ye well fulfill?

First Angel.

He sits alone and gazes on his hands,
Then folds them in his tunic, hidden so
From his own eyes,—no other dares come near.
And thus I heard him speak: "Here I am Cæsar,—
Here life and death are held in my two hands,
These Roman hands,—no Jew has power like this;
And if he dies, I kill him,—I who saw
No sign of guilt which touched Imperial Rome,—
I who have told the Jews: 'Behold the man!
I find no fault in him.' Alas! Alas!
How weakly, at their threat of Rome's ill-will,
I shrank before their clamor; but 'tis done:—
A Roman's word has passed; and lo, 'tis done.
'Twould be as weak to change it.'" Many times
His wife has tried to reach him, armed each one
With words like adder's fangs, or feigning dreams
Which frightened her, wherein she saw the man.
She saw him with her waking eyes, indeed,
And liked not well the sight,—the twisted thorns

Upon his brow, the mocking royal robe,
The bloody whip wherewith the Roman still
Did hope to bring to pity that wild crowd
The High Priest stirred against him,—this she saw;
Now, thwarted, she so lifts her voice, it seems
That he must hear, within his chamber shut;
But when she leaves off, such a silence reigns
As when a soul (enwombed on earth awhile,
Here to receive from tendrils of the vine,
From white-upfloated grace of eagle's flight,
From heroes' glances, fibres fitting it
For the next higher life) departs from this,—
Such silence fills the Palace, and such awe.

Archangel.

And thou, my brother, what of Caiaphas?

Second Angel.

The High Priest on his roof did much rejoice
To see and hear the shouting crowd below,—
His praises hear, as Saviour of them all,
Who else had all been punished for one's crime
Of treason against Cæsar. Not for long,
When I had come, rejoiced he, but amazed
And trembling stood.

Archangel.

Ye whipped them both, the Gentile and the Priest?

First Angel.

I crave thy pardon, Mighty Minister,
But when I saw the Roman matron stand,
A statue of contempt, I pitied him.

Archangel.

Always thou wert too pitiful.

Second Angel.

Ill suits
Our brother with this plane of earthly life.

Archangel.

And thou? It was my hope thou wouldst be stern
With Caiaphas, the mover of them all.

Second Angel.

As from a heathen woman's face, the veil
I stripped from that black soul,—as in a glass
Showed him its naked, writhing ugliness. Dismayed
He raised aloft his hands; and from this act
The crowd, mistaking, yet more fury roared,
As though he urged them on. Then, sore afraid,
He crouched and shrank and turned away his face.

First Angel.

I think by this his purpose may be changed.
And, with him changed, the Roman will make haste
To halt the punishment.

Second Angel.

I think not so,—
Too loudly has he shouted through the streets
His "Death for blasphemy!" He will not change.

Archangel.

The everlasting will must be fulfilled.

First Angel.

Is there no other way? To bear this long
Is more than I can hope. No other way?

Archangel.

Not for a race so steeped in wickedness
Will lesser sacrifice than this avail.

First Angel.

See! Where they pass the outer gate. They shout,—
Why shout the Gentiles, too?—"All hail, O King!"

Archangel.

Our brother, needed for the final scene,—
Go say to the Death Angel that he now
Make ready on yon hill. The time draws near.

Second Angel.

I must obey thee, Mighty Minister.

First Angel.

Within the city gate, behind the crowd,
I see a hooded figure, with weak steps.
Look how it falters and would turn to fly,
Yet follows on,—yet feebly follows on,
As though it still must follow.

Archangel.

Hither bring
Whatever this may be. Perhaps thus veiled
The brother I have sent for comes.

First Angel.

Behold!

I have obeyed.

The Hooded Figure.

A most sweet voice I heard,
Yet no man see that spoke. Who art thou,
friend?

Archangel.

Thou, too, art veiled: I ask thee, who art thou?

The Hooded Figure.

One who would gladly not be any man,
Who curses her that brought him to the light.

Archangel.

What! voice of Jew, and sad at such a time?

The Hooded Figure.

The man is innocent,—yea, more than that,—
Perhaps even more than man. Mysterious one,
As thou hast power to speak, upon thy soul
I lay his death, if thou proclaim this not.
The man is innocent, and I have said,—
Yea, I, even I,—have said it.

Archangel.

Thou hast said!

The High Priest and the holy court have said
He doth blaspheme.

The Hooded Figure.

From jealousy of power
The High Priest sought his death. The people all
Were following after him, as well they might.

Archangel.

Rash being! What the High Priest may have willed
Is not within thy knowledge, as I think.

The Hooded Figure.

I would that thought were mine. One like to him,
A teacher such as he, has not been sent
Unto this people, and yet I,—even I,—
The chosen guide of those to whom he came,—
I led them forth to Cæsar's governor,
To ask his death upon the Roman cross.

Archangel.

Thou?

The Hooded Figure.

Yea, I. Behold!

Archangel.

The Holy Priest!

First Angel.

Look, Caiaphas!—they dig upon yon hill
To plant the cross.

Caiaphas.

Ah, me! I dare not look!
Within the twinkling of an eye is done
Mischiefs long ages are too short to mend.

Archangel.

Unwisely said, great judge and holy priest,—
One word from thee,—there needs but this alone.
Speak to the Roman, and right willingly
He will unmake his order for this death.

Caiaphas.

Washer of hands!—he would not. I am not
A stranger sent from Rome, who knows not God
And reckes not who blasphememes His holy name,
But one who thought,—who tried think,—just cause
There was in blasphemy for death.

Archangel.

But go!
Go quickly now and speak to him the truth.

Caiaphas.

Well, be it as thou wilt,—this should be tried.

Archangel.

There is no other hope.

Caiaphas.

Yea, yea,—I go!
I cannot move. My feet are chained to earth.
And all shall now be finished,—he must die!
Ah, curses on the day that I was born!

Archangel.

Give me thy trembling hand, that I may help—

Caiaphas.

I move,—I move,—I go! The Lord be praised!
And thou, mysterious friend, I bless thy hand.

Archangel.

In stumbling haste he runs. Before him speed
And draw aside the Roman. Bring thou him,
If he will any wise be brought; but far
From Caiaphas mislead him.

First Angel.

If I may!

Archangel.

And thou who comest with a gloomy brow
Hast found the fair Death Angel?

Second Angel.

On a height,
A bare bright peak, I saw him laid asleep,
Gleaming, as near gleamed hues of gold and blue
And grey and red, upon the lapsing sands,
The unquenched beauty of primeval fires.
A heavenly butterfly at first he seemed,
To earth there fallen wounded. At my call
He rose up slowly, slowly spread his wings,
And, looking o'er the desert, sang this song:

“The Sands are a furnace that fines with fire
And the Sun's great hammer doth beat the gold
Of the heart and the life to a saint's desire,
Or the rapture of one who would sing of old
Clear man and the swath of his ire.

“Where the walled city’s glories wax faint and die
A city I see never made with hands:—
The King of that City, upborne on high,
Is casting a shadow upon the sands,
But a light on a face nearby!

“A light on a woman who would not go,
But lingers anear him, the last of them all,—
A woman of sin, lone, weeping below,—
A scarlet drop for the sin doth fall,
But a tear for the woman’s woe.

“‘They have taken my lord, and I know not where
They have laid him.’ And ‘Mary!’ she hears
one say,
And she: ‘Rabboni!’ The furnace glare
All dross from her spirit has burned away.
Till love such as this is there!’”

Archangel.

Greatly it grieves our brother to behold
The void, wild looks of those a soul forsakes.
He rose unwillingly, but he will come!

Second Angel.

There on the height, with half-averted face,
Hand over hand upon his hilt, he waits,
To hear thy dread command and to obey.

Archangel.

The everlasting will must be fulfilled.

Second Angel.

But see! One sinks beneath his heavy cross,—
May I not help him, Mighty Minister?

Archangel.

Such weakness would all suffering worlds undo.

Second Angel.

One faints and falls. Is not she one of those
Who ministered to him in Galilee?
They lift her now,—a woman lifts, and John.

Archangel.

It is the sinful woman. Men have said
Too much with sinners he has passed his days.

Second Angel.

May I not help the one whom sorely now
The Gentile soldiers strike?

Archangel.

Fair brother, no!

As now thine own, these tragic scenes must move
Men's pity in the ages yet to come,
Yea, all men in all regions. To a cross,
A copy of the one despised now there,
Shall Kings in legion bow the head, the knee.
This holy one his word shall send afar:
Slowly it moves, a river through the sand:
I see it wind through crumbling banks and sink,
Not ceasing when unshown. But in his name
Shall men be burned whose love for their own kind
Shall be their sin. And in his name shall hate,—

Shall bitter hate be sown, who taught sweet love,—
In his fair name more cruel wars be fought
Than ever yet were known, and bloody hands
Be lifted to his shade in impious thanks
As though he helped men slaughter.

Second Angel.

No! Ah, no!
It cannot be! No—No! This cannot be!
Has he not banned such savage ways of men?

Archangel.

And have not men for this a cross set up
To thank him yonder?

Second Angel.

Now thy word is true
But will not all be changed? He mocks the law
And changes, saying he does but fulfill,—
The law which orders vengeance, as for sin
Of woman, death by stoning. Bending down
To write with finger on the Temple's floor,
When elders brought a woman, tempting him
To speak, from pity, counter to the law,
He wrote upon the sand, then slowly said:
“Let him that sins not be the first to cast
A stone at her.” So did he mock the law
Of blood and vengeance; and no wars can be
'Mid those who follow him.

Archangel.

Who follow him,
Who truly follow him, but many a man

Shall call upon his name but basely shun
To follow where he leads.

Second Angel.

He taught them love,—
Taught only brother love. Will love not change
The ways of men?

Archangel.

Yea, slowly. Teachers false,
Taking his garb, forsaking all he taught,
Shall hatred sow for ages yet to come.
But here and there a few white flowers shall rise,—
I see them now, and in the distant time.—

The Woman.

Go thou,—yes, leave me, John, for there is need.
I shall be stronger soon, for my great love,
Which overcame, shall lift me up again,
That I may follow on unto the end.

Archangel.

Alas, poor woman! Now, she turns aside
Too weak to totter farther.

Second Angel.

Is not this
Of those white flowers but now in vision seen?

The Woman.

Ye that speak, who are ye? None I see.
Still works the swoon upon me, as it seems.

Archangel.

A great Archangel I—a mighty power.

The Woman.

Then, wherefore with a woman idling thus?
Is not thy duty yonder, smiting those
That slay the righteous one?

Archangel.

It had been so
Of old. Jehovah reigned, another now,
Above a changing world. In either's time,
What life and death ye call are nothing more
Than sleep and waking are. What matters, then,
Their slaying this one?

The Woman.

Naught I understand
Is, then, Jehovah dead? Alas!—Alas!

Archangel.

Not so, but for earth's race one lesson then,—
Another now,—one threat,—one promise then,
To lead and guide you upward on the way
To pure perfection.

The Woman.

Naught I understand.
I am a sinner,—no perfection seek.
I only love the Master,—only this.

Archangel.

No more but this concerns thee, faithful one.

The Woman.

But look,—why dost thou let such tortures be?

Archangel.

Dost thou, then, bid me smite them, faithful one?

The Woman.

Who, I, the worst of sinners? How should I
Command Archangels?

Archangel.

To Jehovah pray
That he may bid me smite them, and I shall.

The Woman.

I was not taught that prayer.

Archangel.

Ask, then, of me,—
Kneel but to me, and ask, and I shall go
As lion through a sheepfold.

The Woman.

'Twas a lamb
He called himself.

Archangel.

Ah! Wretched woman, pray.
Kneel down and rescue him who rescued thee!

The Woman.

Oh! Snatch him from these cruel ones!

Archangel.

But thou
Wilt lend no little word that tearing thorns
Be cut away to let the lamb go free?
Wilt thou forsake him here, thy love grown cold?
Still silent?—I shall wait.

Second Angel.

Behold! she goes
With feeble steps and looking not behind.

Archangel.

Alas, poor woman!

Second Angel.

See!—Our brother comes alone!

First Angel.

The Roman would not come, tho' much I tried!

Archangel.

The everlasting will must be fulfilled.

First Angel.

There yet he sat, within the chamber shut,
Still gazed upon his hands, so moving them
As though he washed them ever. In that tone
The spirit knows to hear, I whispered him:
“Come,—end these scenes of shame,—arise and
come.

Short time for this remains. What shall be said
In Rome of such a Roman? Thou hast squeezed
One drop from those stained fingers?” To his eyes
He pressed these, crying: “What, a Jew!—

A wretched, wandering beggar Jew, despised
 By his own people,—a seditious Jew!
 What will Rome know, what care, when I shall
 speak,—
 When I shall say,—and is it not the truth?—
 I tried to save him when their court condemned?
 When I shall tell he sought to shake the power
 Of Cæsar in Judea?" At this thought
 He strove to smile, whereat my anger burned
 Out to the plumage-tips. Then, through the door
 He saw writhe in a serpent, to the skin
 And threatening head whereof the stars and flowers
 Had lent their colors; through whose length the ribs
 Twisted and turned, as whorls of a fierce storm;
 And, as a storm, he hissing terror flashed,—
 Slowly came in and coiled and struck his hand.
 "It is the blood!" the trembling wretch exclaimed.
 Then rushed he forth, and hastened through the
 street;
 And there I left him, by retainers chased,
 Who feared and marveled.

Archangel.

Well!—and Caiaphas?

First Angel.

When Caiaphas unto the Palace came,
 The guards derided,—mocked him,—called him
 mad—
 They would not let him enter; thence he ran,
 Crying aloud: "The only one not mad
 In all the city am I, Caiaphas!"

Archangel.

The everlasting will must be fulfilled.

Second Angel.

See now! The men who came from Galilee
No longer follow,—save a few; but stand
Doubting, or turn and mingle with the crowd.
The women all yet follow.

First Angel.

Now they reach
The bottom of the hill. The shouts have ceased;
No more the Jews now mock. The soldiers cry:
“Bow down, then, to his Kingship!”

Archangel.

Gentiles,—Jews,
Were joined by him in care and now are joined
To crucify him.

Caiaphas.

It was here, I think,
I heard that wondrous voice. O friend!—dear
friend!

Archangel.

What wouldst thou, most wise judge and reverend
priest?

Caiaphas.

I know not what to do!

Archangel.

What answer gave
The mighty Roman?

Caiaphas.

Him in vain I sought,—
They called me mad. Mysterious counselor,
This must not be so finished!

Archangel.

Aye,—it must.

Caiaphas.

But wherefore?

Archangel.

Wherefore have men not hearkened to the word?
Great teachers, Jew and Gentile, did God send,
Yet crimes unnatural scarce hide from day.

Caiaphas.

Speak not of this, but help me,—help me now!
Yonder, behold, the end is drawing near.

Archangel.

No end
But a beginning. High upon a hill
The light shall now be raised.

Caiaphas.

Is there no help?
No mercy,—none for him,—for me,—for me
Who have such need of mercy?

Archangel.

Ask thyself,
Ask Pilate, what of mercy. Ye should know
What has become of mercy.

First Angel.

Thee I pray,
Great Minister, to spare this guilty one.

Caiaphas.

In but the twinkling of an eye, it seems—

Archangel.

Thyself did strangle mercy! On a hill
The light shall now be lifted,—on one side
Of this thyself shalt now be hung aloft,—
On one the Roman,—thus shall shine the light
Between two darknesses, the ages through.

Caiaphas.

But listen!—listen! Didst thou hear some words?

First Angel.

It seemed as though I heard a voice which cried—

Caiaphas.

Which cried?—Oh, tell me if I heard aright!

First Angel.

“Forgive them, for they know not what they do!”

Caiaphas.

’Tis so I heard, O greater than a King!

Archangel.

To whom the angels and archangels bow,—
Whom Jews and Gentiles slay.

Caiaphas.

But I,—but I,—
I could not be forgiven,—no, not I!

Archangel.

Rash earthling, say not so. For even the worst
Comes mercy from that prayer.

Caiaphas.

But I am worse—
Worse than the worst am I.

Archangel.

Not so,—not so!
Thou art a flail within the hand of one
That strikes in darkness only. Soon or late
That prayer shall rescue earthlings every one.
Ye know not what ye do, poor stumbling things!
But see! Upon the tomb which waits for him,
And waits for all of you, the rays that shine,—
The shadow of the cross upon the sands,—
The light upon the sepulchre!

First Angel.

And look!
The woman does not swoon and fall, but stands
Serene and comforted, as when she stood
Within the Temple and the elders shrank
In guilty shame away.

FRAGMENTS

I

Is she thinking how oft near the slippery stair
How many have tottered of those silent there
As she passes? Well, maybe, themselves, they
forget
Like a moth how each followed a flame in her
turn,
How praise made them dizzy, the sigh of regret
For roses ungathered. Her cheeks, how they
burn!
But, as for the others, what thought makes them
fair?
Ah, butterflies dwelling far up in the trees
And bathing each moment their charms in the
breeze
Could never, I think, feel as dainty as these!

II

Ye quiet birds, sweet kindred in the trees,
Long have I left you for the marts of men,
To see them drain to-morrows to the lees,
And of to-days scarce tasting. Now, again
Let me near spirits clear and all that sings,
Beings of upper air and joyous wings,
Share in the gentle folding of these hills.
Where next ye dine ye know not,—not one grain
Stored,—not a thought for all time's threat of ills;
While I, afar, with aching heart and brain,

Pursue and search through endless, winding
ways,—
Tho', too like you, for neither gain nor praise.
Now, by this laughing brook, let's wander far
In friendship old and sweeter than yon star
Which waits to be the seal upon the fold
Of one more finished day.

III

When the swallows fail and to the tinkling quiver,
Leave the waters, of a tender toned guitar,
Is there naught, Dear, trembling near thee on the
river
Save the music and our well-belovèd star?

And above thee, with her garments torn and flying,
All enamored and forsaken in the skies,
When the midnight in wild ecstasies is dying,
Is it only then the lonely midnight sighs?

When thou hearest, half-awakened, a lone singing,
Like a bird, Dear, singing longer than the rest,
Dost thou know, then, at thy window what is
winging:
Dost thou rise and long to clasp it to thy breast?

It is near thee when thy pathway seems the clearest
From the troubling and the doubting and the
fears,
It is near thee, O Belovèd,—it is nearest
Beside thee, lying still amid thy tears.

IV

In solitudes, where wealth and scorn abide
And self is god, thy crown shall not be thorns,
But serpents. With the lowly choose thy side.
There, there is glory which the more adorns
That but the soul may see it, when dim eyes
Like birds are wakened by the voice of one
Forsaking not; there, in the mute replies
Of hand to hand, a sweetness, music's own.
Great kings shall bow before a greater king,
Proud argosies with emptiness return;
But there is gladness, like the rains of spring,
There peace and rest for aching hearts that yearn.

V

The fates but once the thread of life unwind.
Dim desolation stretched her desert sand
Before him; and he dared not look behind,
Where gates forever sealed and silent stand.
Ere they were sent from those forbidden skies
He felt an impulse, dreaming, nothing more:
He looked into the future and her eyes:
Then saw he, like a shadow cast before,
That other; and they two went hand in hand
Among the lilies; and he could not tell
One from the other quite, nor understand
How they did seem, by some new miracle,
Not two, but one,—that one, now come again.
And from this doubt the tremblings yet remain.

VI

He called again,—for long, he did not call.
He sighed to see the trees about the door:
Their leaves were dropping near the convent wall
As he had seen them many times before.

She saw him,—then she saw but falling leaves,
Poor cloistered heart, and scarce found strength
to speak.

“He loves young flowers he bindeth in his sheaves,”
She murmured in a voice as kind as meek.

VII

There, on the bed, she lay; he sat beside,—
Hopeless, quite hopeless,—very calm and still.
It seemed but yesterday since as a bride
He saw her lying so. “Would love or will,”
His soul he questioned, “fail me, in her stead
To yield up life,—to watch the tide outpour
From severed veins, till light and life were fled,
And she upraised, and I upon the floor?”

Jealous of life and light, of earth and sky,
He asked and answered silently,—none knew.
That hour,—that moment, as the years go by,
Returns upon him ever fresh and true,—
An hour of nothing done, of nothing said;
And yet therein full half of all his days
Seem sacredly enclosed. The trees have shed
Their blossoms in the spring,—in autumn’s haze

Their yellowing leaves; and dews of morn and
tears

Of those who knew her, whom he therefore loves,
Have come to him, and even hopes and fears. . . .

VIII

I feel thy beauty as an anguish keen,
O cankered lily, fading in the moon;
And over thee in trembling hope I lean,
As when one waxeth whiter in a swoon.

Put thy strong arms around me, too, O Death!
Hold me that I forget,—at least, forget!
Left in this vale, I linger, drawing breath,
When o'er the heights the star of love hath set

Oh, lead me to that kingdom, king of all,
Where thou hast taken whatsoe'er is best
And dear and lovely! Take me,—hear my call!—
Where the lovely and the loving are at rest.

IX

I sit and I watch as the camels swing
Along the hard road from the far-off land
(One heart, one heaven, the news they bring).
I am learning to love it—the limitless sand
And the clean, sweet bell that the camels ring—

Though I hear in the distance the desolate cry
Of Hagar, afar from her faint boy gone,

For she walleth: "I cannot see him die!"

Though I hear, when the others have hurried on,
Alone by the sepulchre Magdalen sigh,—

Though a mirror of glass is the limitless sand,
And I needs must look at myself therein,
And there is no cover that may withstand
The might of its clearness, to hide one sin
Of the sins long-cherished or newly-planned:

All naked I see them,—the good as well,—
Of this not the half of the whole I thought,
But the little doth ring like the camels' bell,—
Though 'tis thus with my soul that the sands
have wrought,
Yet I love it,—the fierce white truth they tell.

X

If thou could'st wreak fierce pride upon the race
And die with plaudits ringing in thine ear,
Of what avail? The crowding times' efface
A glittering name, however high and clear.

Where, through the night, the quavering screech-
owl's cry
Startles the ears of those who yet can hear,
There lay thee down: the birds that linger by
Shall wake thee not when leaves are green or
sere,—

Shall wake thee not when skies are dark or fine:
All weathers shall be friends, each season best;

And kings shall meaner requiem have than thine,
When pines shall sing above thy dreamless rest.

XI

Ye that loll on your beds of ease,
Do you ever peer out through the flimsy veil
Between your sins and the crimes of these?
Have ever ye hearkened the children's wail
Or the sigh of the criminal's wife? Stay, please!

It may trouble a few of the comforting saws
Ye have cherished since Cain uttered impudent
things,
To notice what penalty out of your laws
On the women and children, the innocent,
springs,
And to ask for their punishment reason or cause,—

To think of a widow or wife,—of the scorn,
Lone, starving, but as she can beg or steal,
Of a daughter who better had not been born,
Of a son of seven years doomed to feel
The winter's chill in his fair May morn.

XII

Sing!—the night is short, Maria!
Sing, ah sing, till it be day!
Once again "Santa Lucia!"
Soon we shall be far away,

In a new-pitched camp o'er ocean
Called a city and our home:
'Tis to us a strange emotion
Shared to-night with thee and Rome.

Such a wail from buried ages!
Such a wild and sweet caress!
And that sigh of peace all sages
Would give all things to possess!

XIII

The ocean stretches far and wide,—
Cramped are the ports and few!
Then let us o'er the wild waves ride!
Ye laggards all, adieu!

How say ye, brothers, would ye feel
The final fortress won,
Or gladlier gird again the steel
That mocks the rising sun?

For me,—I'd hear the clarion
That leads the glorious fray!
Life's battle, let it still go on,
And ye who will, go pray!

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